

SERMONS.

BY

THE LATE REVEREND

GEORGE CARR,

SENIOR CLERGYMAN of the ENGLISH EPISCOPAL
CONGREGATION in EDINBURGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE SIXTH EDITION;

To which is prefixed,
SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

DUBLIN:

Printed by S. COLBERT, 136, Capel-street, opposite Abbey-street,
1785.

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1864.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Reader may justly expect some account of an Author whose posthumous works are recommended to his perusal: but what incidents worth communicating to the Public, can be expected to diversify the life of a clergyman, placed in an humble station, and more studious of displaying, through the whole course of it, the meekness and humility, the mild virtues and gentle spirit of the gospel, than ambitious of acquiring honors, wealth, or fame?

THE Author of these Discourses was born at Newcastle upon Tyne, the 16th of February 1704-5. He was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge; where he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts. Soon after his return to Newcastle, he went into Orders: and in the year 1737, he was appointed Senior Clergyman of the Episcopal Chapel at Edinburgh; where he spent the remainder of his days.

And though most severely and frequently afflicted with the gout, the paroxysms of which he bore with wonderful patience and resignation, he continued to officiate to the very close of his life. For on the morning of Sunday the 18th August 1776, he was preparing, as usual, to discharge his duty in the pulpit; when, without any unusual appearances of disease, or any alarming symptom of his approaching dissolution, he suddenly expired.

It is but justice to his memory to mention, that the following Discourses do not appear to have been prepared by the Author for the press; they were selected by the Editor out of a great many, as of most general utility, and of course most worthy the notice of the Public. It is hoped, they are of sufficient merit to bear ample testimony to his learning, taste, and eloquence, as a Preacher. His virtues as a Man and a Christian, are briefly, but faithfully, summed up in the following monumental inscription.

Near

Near this Place are deposited
The REMAINS

of
THE REVEREND GEORGE CARR;

Senior Clergyman of this Chapel;

In whom

Meekness and Moderation,

Unaffected Piety,

and

Universal Benevolence,

Were equally and eminently conspicuous.

After having faithfully discharged the Duties

of

His sacred function

During thirty-nine Years,

He died

On the 18th August 1776,

In the 71st Year of his Age,

Beloved, Honoured, Lamented!

His Congregation,

Deeply sensible of the loss they have sustained

By the Death of this excellent Person,

By whose mild yet pathetic Eloquence,

By whose exemplary yet engaging Manners,

They have been so long instructed in the Duties

and

Animated to the Practice

of

Pure Religion,

Have erected this Monument,

To record

The Virtues of the Dead

and

Gratitude of the Living.

TO
THE CONGREGATION
OF THE ENGLISH EPISCOPAL CHAPEL
AT EDINBURGH,
FOR WHOSE INSTRUCTION
THESE DISCOURSES WERE COMPOSED,
BEFORE WHOM THEY WERE DELIVERED,
AND
AT WHOSE REQUEST
THEY ARE NOW SENT INTO THE WORLD;
THESE VOLUMES,
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF
THE ESTEEM, AFFECTION, AND RESPECT,
INVARIABLY SHOWN BY THEM
TO THE AUTHOR WHILE ALIVE,
ARE MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED
BY
HIS DISCONSOLATE WIDOW.



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CONSISTENT

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

Happinefs of being under the Govern- ment of PROVIDENCE.

PSAL. xcvi. 1.

The Lord is King, the earth may be glad thereof.

OF all the erroneous doctrines ever advanced by the
adversaries of religion, none can be more void of
foundation, or more pernicious in its influence, than
the opinion, that the world received its being, and still
subsists, without the agency of a supreme, super-
intending Intelligence. From the slightest view of the
of nature, we may infer the existence of an all-pow-
erful, all-wise Being, the eternal and original Cause of all
things. The whole creation utters this great and lead-
ing truth to mankind in a language so clear and intel-
ligible, that *none but the fool can say, There is no God.*
Whether we look up to the firmament above, or down
upon the face of the earth; whether we consider how
wonderfully we ourselves, or all other beings, are made,
—we shall find that every thing above or beneath,
every thing within or without us, the whole frame of
nature, the whole system of wonders that present them-
selves to us, proclaim with a thousand voices the hand
that made them. It were endless to enumerate all the
particulars which concur to evince this truth. In gen-
eral, the power, wisdom, and design, conspicuous in
the whole system of nature; the signs of divine work-
manship visible in the heavens; the structure of this
earth, allotted for our habitation, and so well fitted up
and furnished for the use of various tribes of crea-
tures, and of man its principal inhabitant; the exqui-
site skill and amazing art that appear in the form and
properties

properties of vegetables, in the organs and faculties of animals, in the mechanism, particularly, of the human body so wonderfully made; and above all, the frame of the soul, and its various intellectual powers; are clear proofs of an original creating Mind. For is it possible to conceive, that all these effects, these evident appearances of counsel and wisdom, can proceed from the undirected, fortuitous motions of unconscious matter? Can we imagine, that all the regularity, harmony, and order we see in the general system of things, can be derived from Chance, whose nature it is to be irregular and ever varying from itself? Can Chance give steady and uniform laws to nature? Can Chance act with all the exactness and accuracy of unerring skill and infinite contrivance? If, when we survey a palace, and observe the grandeur and symmetry of the whole, and the elegance and just disposition of its parts, we never fail to infer the skill and ability of the architect; shall we not much more, when we contemplate the universe, the palace of the ALMIGHTY, when we view the beauty and magnificence that every where appear; when we see all the characters of infinite wisdom and power in the design and execution, and all the expressions of such art as no art can surpass; shall we not discern an all-wise, omnipotent Architect, who planned and erected the amazing fabric? In short, all the works of creation bear such evident testimony to the agency of a Divine Intelligence, that the farther we carry our inquiries into the constitution of nature, we meet with so many more still clearer evidences of a perfectly wise, powerful and good Author of it; the proofs of his existence multiply upon us so fast, and appear so endless and inexhaustible, that it scarce seems credible that a principle of Atheism should ever find admission into the human understanding.

And as certain as it is that there is a God who created all things, so certain is it that he acts as sovereign of the universe; that his supreme providence ruleth over all things, and has the care and superintendence of his creation. For were we to suppose it otherwise, and that the world is not under the care and government of
its



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its Creator ; no other reason could be assigned, than that he is either wanting in power or inclination, unable or unwilling to govern it. But neither of these suppositions can be admitted. He who was able to create the world, cannot want ability to superintend and govern it. All the powers of nature must be dependent on HIM who gave them their being. All things must obey that Voice which spoke the word, and they were made ; were made from nothing ; and, with regard to any resistance they can make to that Voice, are as nothing still. The whole world is in HIS hands justly represented only as a drop of the morning-dew, or as the dust of the balance, which he may dissipate with the least breath of his power. To him it is infinitely easy to preside over all events, to direct all the influences of natural causes, to govern all contingencies, to provide for the interests of communities and kingdoms, and for the security and happiness of every individual in them. As, then, the Supreme BEING cannot be supposed to be defective in power to govern the world, so neither can he be wanting in inclination. For is it reasonable to think, that God takes no care of the world, which, with so much care and wisdom, he created ? Is it reasonable to suppose, that he who introduced us into being, and by that act contracted the relation of a parent to us, with all the obligation of affectionate care and paternal regard resulting from it ; is it reasonable, is it possible, to suppose, that he would give up all regard and attention to his creatures, his children, his family upon earth ? He who gave us being, must be concerned for our well-being too. He who is perfect wisdom and goodness, will, in every instance, take such care of us as perfect goodness and wisdom require. And indeed, far from supposing in God any disinclination to superintend and govern the world, we cannot form to ourselves an employment more glorious in itself, or more worthy of his infinite perfections, than from his throne in heaven to inspect the immeasurable dominions of his universal empire ; to have the administration of all its affairs, the appointment of all events, and to conduct the whole with un-

erring wisdom and unrestricted goodness. With great truth and propriety, therefore, the text asserts, that the LORD is King, and consequently that the earth may be glad thereof.—For what can afford more rational grounds of the sublimest joy, than the consideration that God governs the earth? What can administer more comfort, than the assurance, that we live not in a forsaken and fatherless world; are not deserted by the great Parent of nature; not abandoned to the power of chance or fate; but are always under the protection of an infinitely wise and good Sovereign, in whose presence and under whose eye we live, whose great and constant object is the security and felicity of his creatures and subjects, and without whose permission no power can injure and no evil approach us? Let us consider the state and condition of human nature, and we shall find the justest grounds to rejoice in the government and protection of this almighty Sovereign. Insufficient to our own happiness; uncertain of what we hope for; insecure even of what we possess; often encompassed with difficulties which we cannot surmount; surrounded often with dangers which we have neither sagacity to foresee, nor ability to oppose, nor skill to elude; full of wants and frailties in ourselves; exposed to injuries and violence from others; thus beset on all sides, liable to disorders within, and to disasters without; what security could we have against dangers, or what consolation under them, were we capable of conceiving that there is no Power above who can either divert the evils that threaten us, or support us under them; no superior Being, to whom we might appeal, and on whose goodness we might repose a confidence? To the eye of Reason, what a dreadful wilderness would life appear; how gloomy would be the prospect, how uncomfortable our pilgrimage through it, did we not believe, that there is an all-powerful and all-gracious hand that invisibly guides our steps, conducts us through the various accidents that beset us, and through all the thousand dangers that are planted in our way!—If there were arguments sufficient to persuade us that there is not a
God

GOD that governs the world, (as there are very sufficient proofs of the contrary) ; yet the belief of a supreme Providence is of such consequence to our happiness, so essential to our well-being, that a wise man would be sorry to give up so pleasing an error, to awake from such a dream of felicity, and to part with a delusion that speaks so much peace and satisfaction to the mind. For, which way soever we turn our thoughts, let them wander through the whole earth, let them range the whole circuit of nature, the mind will find no rest, no sufficient support, no probable foundation of happiness, but in the being and providence of God. No other principle but this, embraced with a steady faith, and attended with a suitable practice, can ever be able to give repose and tranquillity to the mind ; to animate our hopes, or extinguish our fears ; to give us any true satisfaction in the enjoyments of life, or to minister consolation under its adversities. If we are persuaded, that God governs the world, that he has the superintendence and direction of all events, and that we are the objects of his providential care ; whatever may be our distress or our danger, we can never want consolation ; we may always have a fund of hope, always a prospect of relief. But, take away this hope and this prospect, take away the belief of God and of a superintending providence, and man would be of all creatures most miserable ; destitute of every comfort, every support, under present sufferings, and of every security against future dangers. *Whom have I in heaven but thee ?* says the Psalmist ; *and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.* God is indeed the chief happiness of man. And certain it is, that were a wise man left to his choice, to wish the greatest possible felicity to himself and to mankind, the highest wish he could form would be, that there were just such a being as we apprehend that God is : a Being possessed of every desirable perfection ; whose power is equal to his wisdom, and his goodness commensurate to both ; whose providence extends to all his works, to the whole world, and to every individual in it ; watches over us, though we forget him ; is mind-ful

ful of us when we are neglectful of ourselves; and is always inclined, as far as he sees it consistent with wisdom and rectitude, and with our happiness upon the whole, to heal all our sorrows, to supply all our wants, to crown all our hopes, and to dissipate all our fears. *The Lord is my light and my salvation*, says the Psalmist: and indeed he is the true light of the world, that gladdens the whole creation. The sun itself is not more necessary to the preservation of our being, than is God, the Sun of the intellectual system, to the well-being of mankind.—But, on the other hand, Infidelity or Atheism takes this Sun as it were out of our firmament, and involves all nature in darkness. The scheme of Atheism is calculated to spread a gloom over the whole intellectual and moral world, to subvert the most solid foundations of human happiness, and to finish and complete the miseries of mankind. It renders it impossible (if we have any reflection) to taste pleasure even in prosperity, and in the seasons of adversity adds bitterness to every sorrow; takes away all comfort from the virtuous, all hope from the afflicted; leaves us unprotected here, and unrewarded hereafter; robs us of our best enjoyments in life, and of all consolation and support in death.

For what support could we find under the approach of our dissolution, what consolation when we are about to descend into the dark region of death, if we had no relief in God, no dependence on the goodness of our Maker, no hope that his hand would conduct us through that gloomy vale, would support us under the awfulness of its terrors, and raise us up in another, happier state? How melancholy would be our condition, and how dreadful our prospect, if we had nothing before us but the sad apprehensions either of utter extinction in the grave, or of some uncertain, perhaps unhappy, existence, which might possibly be our lot, amidst the endless revolutions of Chance, or by the laws of irresistible Fate! If it were true, and we could be assured, that there is no God who made, and no Providence that governs the world, it would be a melancholy

choly truth, which we should have reason to mourn as long as we have a being. Unprotected by a Superior Power, we should be exposed to every species of evil; nor could we be sure, that we and our sufferings would be extinguished even in the grave. We could have no assurance, that we should not be dragged by some fatal chain of causes from the present to some more unhappy state. But, happily for us, every thing within and without us tells us, in the silent language of nature, that there is a God,—there is a Creator and Governor of the world. And how does our prospect brighten up when we change the view, and consider ourselves under the care and tutelage of a God, by whose providence all things are conducted; whose mercies are over all his works; who has all events in his hands, and can do whatsoever pleaseth him, but never pleaseth to do but what is right and good! How may we congratulate ourselves, that we are under the protection of so much goodness! how rejoice, that HE to whom all things in heaven and earth are obedient, deigns to consider us as objects of his care! What though we are beset with dangers, exposed to numberless accidents, to many known, many unknown evils? Yet we are sure, that we are befriended by infinite goodness, and protected by omnipotent power: we know, that an all-seeing eye watcheth over us, and that an almighty arm defends us as with a shield. This consideration ought always, in every situation, and in all circumstances, to support our hopes, and speak peace to the mind. If there is a God; if he is the sovereign of nature, and holds the sceptre of the universe; however gloomy appearances may be, there is always room for consolation and hope. If God be for us, it imports little who is against us; if he is on our side, we need not fear what man, what the world can do unto us.—But let it be remembered, that, in order to recommend ourselves to his protection, it must be our habitual endeavour to render ourselves worthy of it; to demean ourselves as good subjects of his government; to live in a faithful allegiance and dutiful submission to him, the great King of all the earth; and to pay

pay him the homage of a constant attention to his will, and the tribute of a willing obedience to his laws. Then may we hope to live secure under his government and protection, whilst we are in this world; and when we depart, to be received into mansions of supreme felicity, into his eternal kingdom; where we shall be for ever happy in his presence, for ever be the blessed objects of his goodness, as he will be of our praise; and where we shall join in concert with the heavenly host, in joyful and perpetual adorations of the Sovereign of the universe.



S E R

S E R M O N II.

Duty of CONSIDERATION.

PSAL. CXIX. 59.

I called mine own ways to remembrance, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

WE are designed by the Author of our being, and disposed by the frame of our nature, not implicitly to follow the guidance of sense, instinct, propensities, or passions, but to form and regulate our whole deportment by the superior principles of reason and duty. We ought, consequently, often to call our ways to remembrance, to examine and review our conduct, and consider what behaviour reason and duty require from us. The Author of our nature conferred on us the privilege of reason, in order to give us a just discernment of good and evil, to point out the different paths of virtue and vice, and the opposite regions of happiness or misery to which they lead. And to show us still more distinctly the consequences of our actions, God has added the light of Revelation to that of Reason; which clearly acquaints us with the measure of our duty, and with the final event of our conduct. It highly becomes us to attend to this light, which he has held out to us; it infinitely concerns us to live up to its directions. And as, amidst those scenes of pleasure which are continually passing before us, and soliciting our affection, we are but too apt to be inattentive, to lose sight of our duty, and sometimes to fall through the deceitfulness of sin; the only method of maintaining or recovering our integrity is, to commune with our heart, and call our ways to remembrance; to stand still sometimes, and observe whither the path we are in will lead us; if we are in

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the right way, that we may walk in it with complacency and assurance; if we have turned aside to the right hand or to the left, that we may stop short before we have wandered too far in the mazes of sin. To this end, we should occasionally enter upon a serious scrutiny into our spiritual state, that we may look well if there be any wickedness in us;—whether there be any sin which we have not repented of;—any duty which we have too much neglected;—any injury done to our neighbour, for which we have not made reparation;—any distempers in the mind which require attention, and for which remedies ought to be applied:—that we may search and examine our heart, and find out what good dispositions we ought to cherish in it, what bad ones to suppress; how many of the latter sort remain to be weeded out, how many of the former to be planted and cultivated.

If we omit this duty, we may fall insensibly into acts, and gradually into habits, of sin. If we neglect this care, this moral husbandry of the mind, various vices may soon shoot up and over-run it: for they are the spontaneous produce of the soil, the natural growth of our corruption;—they require no care nor culture, but flourish most when most neglected.

So feeble, indeed, is our nature, and so powerful and numerous our temptations, that we ought always with unremitting diligence to guard our hearts. But such is the deceitfulness of sin, that, in order to destroy us, it first infatuates. Vice is ever disinclined to dwell and associate with Reason: it persuades the sinner, therefore, to shun consideration; to shut his ears to the monitions of conscience; not to allow himself leisure to think, nor coolness to deliberate; but to keep his mind employed abroad in foreign pursuits, in order to prevent its returning home and giving a painful attention to domestic cares; or to fly to any excess that may help him to forget himself and his fears, and hide him from his own reflections.

But however artful the sinner may be in keeping off reflection, yet the season of reflection will come. Misfortune,



fortune, sickness, or age, will introduce it: and then conscience will arrest, and call him to account; will resume its place and authority; and with a voice not to be silenced, will then severely remind him, that he is accountable to a Being whose justice no artifice can elude, and from whose eye no darkness can conceal; that though he may deceive the world, or even his own heart, yet he cannot deceive God, who is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things.

How much wiser is it, then, to attend to this internal monitor, whilst it admonishes and advises with a friendly voice, than to shut our ears to its admonitions, till it can speak to us only in accusations and reproaches! How much better to call home our wandering thoughts, and to consider our ways, whilst we can do it with comfort, and confidence in the divine mercy, than to defer this needful work, till conscious guilt shall lie in wait for us, and meet us in every reflection! How much more prudent to advert to our danger when it is in our power to avoid it, than to rush blindfold upon destruction, or to go on amusing ourselves with a mistaken false security till we have approached too near the precipice to escape it!

It concerns us, therefore, frequently to examine and ask our heart, in what manner we have acquitted ourselves in the duties required of us. Have we acted in conformity to the design of our Creator when he gave us our being? Has it been our first and principal care to observe the rules and precepts of the religion he has prescribed? Have we duly cultivated those seeds of virtue and goodness which he has sown in our hearts? Have they taken root, and brought forth in us the fruit of good living? or have they not, as soon as they sprung up, been choaked by the idle cares, or idler pleasures, of the world? Have we, as good and faithful servants, diligently employed the talents intrusted to our care in such useful and benevolent offices as piety and virtue demand from us? If to these interrogatories our heart can reply without self conviction, let

us go on and proceed to a still farther proficiency in all virtue and goodness.

Sin is to the soul what disease is to the body; and it is consideration only which can heal its sores, and restore the soul's health. To a good man this practice will give that conscious pleasure, that secret self-satisfaction, which arises in the mind from the approbation of its own actions. For he whose heart is animated with pious and devout affections to the Supreme Being; who, from veneration for his greatness, gratitude for his mercies, and just sentiments of his goodness, endeavours to pay him an unreserved obedience; whose habitual care it is to be faithful and just in all his dealings, and, as far as may be, to contribute to the well-being and happiness of his fellow-creatures; to indulge no inclinations that are injurious to others; to keep himself in a fit disposition for the discharge of his duties both to God and man,—cannot but review his conduct with a peculiar satisfaction and complacency.

But to the sinner this duty of consideration, this moral review, is of the first importance. For unless he calls his ways to remembrance, how shall he become sensible of his danger? or how retreat from a danger of which he is not made duly sensible? By neglecting this duty, he may go on from sin to sin, and continue his progress through the several successive stages of iniquity, till at last, when he looks round and surveys his situation, he may see nothing behind him but scenes of unrepented guilt; nothing before him but the certain consequences, a dreadful eternity, and an offended God! Whereas, if we stop short of our progress in order to deliberate, a little reflexion will teach us, that sin is the reproach of our reason, the dishonour of our nature, the bane of all our present and future happiness. Reflexion will show it in its native deformity, stripped of that thin disguise, and those counterfeit ornaments, in which the passions and folly of mankind endeavour to decorate and dress it. We shall find, that it is a dangerous opposition to, and rebellion against, that Sovereign Being under whose inspection we live

and move, and who will sooner or later vindicate the authority and honour of his laws: that it is ingratitude to our heavenly Father and Benefactor, whose goodness gave us existence; whose providence kindly supports and protects it, with a care that never slumbers; whose bounty has supplied the necessaries, conveniencies, and blessings of life; for which he desires, no returns but gratitude and obedience; which are not at all advantageous to him, but highly so to ourselves: that the consequences of sin must be to the last degree fatal, if not in this world, most certainly in the next.

Such indeed is the weakness or negligence of mankind, such their inattention to their actions, that seldom they seriously deliberate on consequences; least of all on those which are of eternal and infinite concernment. Seldom they consider in what troubles, anxieties, and distresses, their iniquities and vices may involve them even in this world; what anguish, sorrow and remorse, may overtake them before they bid adieu to it; with what confusion they must be covered when death approaches; and what terrors will accompany them when they are entering into eternity.

All the delusions by which we are ensnared and betrayed into sin, will, when traced to their source, be found to proceed from want of consideration. It concerns every one, therefore, the sinner particularly, often to deliberate, often to call home his scattered thoughts, and thus to commune with his heart: "Short and uncertain is my remaining portion of years; and the grave and eternity cannot be far distant. Soon I must bid adieu to the world, soon pass from the present to a very different scene, where the criminal enjoyments which now employ all my attention will vanish, and nothing of them remain but the bitter remembrance of their guilt. I must then appear before the awful tribunal of an infinitely just, and holy, and impartial Judge; where I must render a strict account

count of all the transactions of my life, where even my thoughts and intentions will be scrutinized; where all my sins will rise up in judgment against me; and a decisive, irreverfible fentence pafs, which will fix my doom for eternal ages."

Such reflexions, often and ferioufly attended to, muft rouse the moft careless, and alarm the moft determined; muft incite and animate us to act as becomes men, as reason, confcience, duty, and intereft, invite; muft make us take heed to our ways, be folicitous to avoid every thing that may provoke the difpleafure of our Judge, and to abound in piety and virtue, which alone can procure his approbation and acceptance, and intitle us to a gracious fentence from him.

A few fhort, occasional, or tranfient reflections on thefe truths, may indeed produce little or no effect upon our lives. They muft be frequently repeated, be admitted often, be as it were daily visitants, and become familiar to the mind, before they can acquire influence enough to govern our affections, and become the principles of an uniform piety. In order therefore, to give them full poffeffion of the heart, and that they may exert all their power and influence in forming and preferving in us a juft and lafting fenfe of the obligations of religion, we ought to give a frequent attendance on the duties of divine worfhip: For nothing can be more effectual to correct inadvertent levity, to direct our attention to religious objects, and to engage us in a courfe of ferious reflections, than a regular attendance on the fervice of God.

May that Almighty Being in whole prefence we now appear, give us grace ever to ferve and obey him in righteoufnefs and true holinefs! May he create in us fuch new and contrite hearts, that we, calling our ways to remembrance, and acknowledging our wretchednefs, may obtain of him, the God of all mercy, perfect remiffion and forgivenefs!

S E R M O N. III.

The Evidences of the GOSPEL entitled to our Assent.

LUKE xvi. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

AMONG the various pleas assigned for not living up to the principles of the Christian religion, one is, a pretended want of conviction of its divine authority. The evidences of the gospel, some alledge, are doubtful and defective. If the Deity, say they, had thought proper to communicate a revelation of his will, and to exact an universal obedience to it, he would have afforded such means of conviction, as would have dissipated all obscurity and uncertainties, and not have suffered his creatures to risk their salvation for want of sufficient light to conduct them into the way of truth. We withhold our assent, therefore, (thus they argue), because we want the proper grounds of assent. But if the Divine Being thought proper to support the authority of the gospel by a repetition of miracles; if some preter-natural appearance should be exhibited for its attestation; or if a messenger should arrive from the dead, and bring with him a faithful, authentic narrative of the state and condition of souls departed, and of the rewards and punishments in another life—we would then resign our scruples, and yield an implicit faith, as well as an absolute obedience, to its doctrines and precepts.

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Such is the language sometimes held, in order to justify a rejection of the gospel, and a neglect of its duties : but how vain and groundless such language is, may be inferred from the determination in the text : *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* Which words are the conclusion of our blessed Saviour's parable ; wherein is represented a rich man, of an uncharitable temper and immoral conduct, who, after he had enjoyed the good things (as they are called) of this world for a season, died, and was conveyed to a place of torment. In this situation, he lifted up his eyes ; and seeing Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, i. e. in a state of felicity, he solicited compassion, and an alleviation of his misery : *Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame.* But finding his doom irreversible, and his anguish incapable of mitigation, he offered a last request, for his surviving brethren, that one might be permitted to return from the dead and testify unto them ; *lest,* says he, *they also come into this place of torment.* The surest method to make an impression on their minds and dispose them to amendment, was, he conceived, to dispatch a messenger from the dead to admonish them of their danger ; one who had experienced another state, and could not therefore fail to convince them of the certainty of it. But this request was denied, and his brethren referred to the evidence already given : *They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.* The tormented person, considering that evidence as insufficient for their conviction, importunately renewed his petition, supposing the testimony he desired would most certainly be effectual : *Nay, Father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* But this was a mistake ; and was accordingly corrected by the father of the faithful, in this definitive sentence : *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* If they yield not to the present evidences of religion, and can resist

its powerful and convictive proofs, they would, for the same reasons, reject every other means of conviction, even the monitions of a messenger sent from the dead.

The Omnipotent may indeed over-rule the powers of the soul, and compel our assent: *The hearts of men are in the hands of the Lord, as the rivers of water; and he can turn them whithersoever he will.*—He may, by a particular miracle, give to the unbeliever such an evident demonstration, and so clear a conviction of the truth, as would at once dissipate all uncertainty and render his assent unavoidable.—But we are to observe, that, for the same reason any one person could expect the favour of a particular miracle for his conviction, every other person might with equal justice form the same expectations. And if all men were to be indulged in their demand of miracles, what evidence might not presumption ask? what scenes of confusion might ensue? what disorder and distraction among the works of nature, whilst the sun went backward, or forward, or stood still for a day, or left us involved in darkness in the midst of his course? It is not easy to say what unreasonable demands some might make, if nature were obedient to their will; or what malicious and revengeful purposes might be executed, if the thunder of the Almighty were intrusted to the hands of men.

But not to insist upon this, nor upon the contradictory demands which might sometimes be made by different persons, (in which case Infinite Power itself could not give them satisfaction), it may only be observed, that if the caprice of every individual were to be at all times gratified with what particular miracle he pleased to request, this would diminish, instead of adding to, the evidence of our religion. For miracles, by becoming thus frequent and familiar, would cease to be any longer miracles to us. Should we daily see some of our departed brethren return to life, as our Lord did after his crucifixion, we should be no more surprised at a resurrection from the dead, than we are now at a recovery from sickness; and our Saviour's divine authority and doctrine could receive no confirmation from that

event. If it were as common to see bodies rise from the grave, as corn from seed sown in the earth, we should endeavour to account for the one, as for the other, from natural causes, without having recourse to the interposition of Heaven. So that, were all the wonderful works of CHRIST and his apostles, which to unprejudiced persons have established Christianity beyond all doubt, were they to become common and familiar, such as we had frequently before us, and every day occurred, it is certain we should be far from esteeming them miracles: we should consider them only as natural events, and behold them without any emotion or surprise. And those new signs and daily prodigies which the infidel requires, would be so far from giving him any further evidence, that they would entirely deprive him of the evidence he has: because what we now call wonderful works, when they thus become usual and frequent, would be no longer wonderful; and the commonness of miracles would destroy their very being. Christianity, therefore, instead of receiving additional evidence from a daily repetition of miracles, would be entirely stripped of the evidence of any miracles at all.

When God is pleased to favour the world with a revelation of his will, it will be a sufficient proof of the authenticity of such revelation, if its doctrines and duties are consonant to our natural notions of the Deity; and if, at the time of its first promulgation, it receive the sanction of Almighty Power, and be confirmed by such signs and wonders and mighty works as plainly point out a divine interposition.

A revelation thus established, and fixed upon this firm basis, has from that moment a claim to a divine original; and we, who live at a remote distance from its first establishment, can desire no other proof of its authority, than a full, clear, and concurrent testimony, of all the intermediate ages from that time to our own, that such mighty works were wrought, that such miracles were publicly exhibited, by the first promulgers of this revelation, as the credentials of their commission from God.

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All this, and more, we have to induce us to acquiesce in the divine authority of the Gospel. We have the testimony of every age since the rise of Christianity, with one voice proclaiming its truth, and asserting, that our blessed LORD wrought many miracles, was crucified, rose again, and ascended into heaven : that the apostles saw and conversed with him after his resurrection, and sealed their testimony with their blood : that this testimony was not merely human ; that they also were enabled to perform many wonderful works, in confirmation of their evidence : that though the world was up in arms against this new religion, yet it triumphed over all opposition, prevailed against received customs and established opinions ; against the prejudices of education, and the stubbornness of superstition ; against the writings of the learned, and the persecutions of the powerful ; and all this without force, without power or policy, without eloquence, without any address or artful application to the passions or interests of men, by its own intrinsic excellence ; and the clear evidence of miracles.

—This is what antiquity loudly asserts ; this is the information conveyed down to us through the channel of tradition, in a clear and continued stream ; and the present establishment of Christianity in the world (of which we ourselves are witnesses, and of which we constitute a part) is derived from this, and founded upon it.

Are they then sincere lovers of truth, who refuse their assent to a testimony so clear and convictive ? When they give credit to Heathen historians, at the same time that they refuse it to the history of the gospel, which, in point of credibility, is, on many accounts, far superior to any history in the world ; to what can this be owing but to prejudice ? When testimony is submitted to in one case, and a much stronger testimony not submitted to in another, what is it but partiality that makes the distinction ? Whilst the heathen historians are believed, at the same time that the sacred historians are rejected, may we not suspect, that the latter are rejected merely because they are sacred, because they condemn and prohibit the vices of the world, and tie

men down to the disagreeable strictness of virtue, and the hated observance of duty?—The Author of the Christian revelation, we may observe, does not mean to force us into the possession of happiness by irresistible compulsion or necessity, but has appointed it to be the consequence and the reward of duty and virtue.

The evidences, therefore, of religion, are sufficient to persuade, but not to compel us to a reception of divine truth. They are proper to produce conviction in the wise and good, but leave to others a power of resisting them: they are plain, clear, and satisfactory to the honest and sincere inquirer; but yet shine not with a light incapable of being withstood by those *who love darkness rather than light*. It is not then the want of evidence to which Infidelity owes its rise and progress, but some other latent cause; and the true one, which men are apt to ascribe to something without, is probably within themselves. When a doctrine is disagreeable to our inclinations, and interferes with some favourite but forbidden passion, some beloved though mistaken interest, we may observe in ourselves an unwillingness to acknowledge, and a propensity to question its truth; it is attended to with reluctance, and disbelieved with pleasure. Persons who, like the rich man's brethren, are intoxicated with the enjoyments of this world, care not to extend their views beyond it: for what satisfaction can the prospect of a future state afford to those who have no hopes in it? This determines them not to yield to the most powerful evidence of its truth; but to lay hold on every expedient that may remove it from their minds; and, like persons averse to a disagreeable object, to shun its appearance in every light.

If God should, in condescension to our requests, dispatch a messenger from the dead, to certify us of our future existence, and of the consequences of our actions; such a message would doubtless greatly astonish and terrify us into some immediate resolutions of preventing our danger, but it is not certain that it would create an entire reformation in our conduct. Though it might command our present attention; yet might it
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not (like the miracles of Moses and Pharaoh) fail of producing any lasting effect? When the surprise should cease, and our fears were removed, we should be apt to attribute it to some illusion or imagery of a disordered fancy; and the return of our passions would dispose us to forget, and by degrees weaken and wear out the impression; and thus disbelieving by little and little, we should gradually relapse into our former infidelity and follies.

Instances are not wanting to convince us of this. The case of persons in a violent fit of sickness, and in their own apprehensions just departing to mingle with the dead, and afterwards returning to the world and to their vices again, is far from being uncommon. Such persons could not be more persuaded, if a messenger had arrived from the dead; nor could they have formed sincerer resolutions to repent and turn to God, if he would mercifully please to spare them. God is merciful, and spares; and by degrees this awful season vanishes, and with it all their convictions and resolutions of obedience.

To conclude: Good men have no need of any supplemental evidence, nor of a continued series of miracles to be repeated before their eyes; for they are convinced without them: and to bad men they would be of fatal consequence; for they, even with them, would not believe. The favour of miracles to men of corrupt hearts would serve only to render them more inexcusable; would aggravate their guilt, and add to their condemnation.

Let us then take care that we be not seduced by the deceitfulness of sin, and that vice hang no fatal bias upon our minds: for when religion opposes us, we are apt to oppose religion; to call in question its evidences; to lay aside the authority of Scripture, and follow what is called the guidance of Nature; to look upon virtue, perhaps, as an empty name, or a fiction of the brain; and thus, under the mask of thinking freely, to gratify our taste in living licentiously. Let us, on the contrary, become lovers of truth and virtue, and we shall
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be secure from any fatal error : if we have an honest and sincere disposition to do the will of God, we shall know that the doctrine of the Scriptures is from him. Instead, then, of requiring any further evidences which we have not, let us make a religious improvement of those we have, by reflecting, that soon we must either be consigned to the same place of torment with those who have lived and died like the rich man, or with Lazarus be conducted by angels into mansions of endless bliss. This life is introductory to another ; and the chief, in a manner the only, value of this world, consists in the opportunity it offers of securing an heavenly inheritance. Let us then keep our eye habitually fixed upon our future scene of existence ; let us suffer no seducements to divert our attention from the great end of our being , and let us make it our chief and constant aim to be good and virtuous, to render ourselves faithful disciples of CHRIST, children of God, and heirs of eternal glory.

S E R M O N IV.

Against Scoffing at RELIGION.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

IN these words, Solomon brands with the imputation of folly, a practice which men are apt to run into from an affectation of wisdom. But perhaps no age has been more fruitful in examples of this species of folly, than the present. No age has seen the principles of religion, the distinctions of good and evil, the obligations of virtue, and the certainty of a future existence, set in a clearer and stronger light, or treated with greater ridicule and contempt. In no age have the doctrines of the Christian faith been more carefully studied, more freely debated, or more unanswerably defended. But as true knowledge has gained ground, the number of those who, without labour or accomplishments, would acquire the reputation of knowledge, has increased likewise; who think they then give the strongest and easiest proof of superior penetration and distinguished parts, when they treat with mirthful scorn those truths which others acknowledge and revere. Some join in the same practice from a different motive, from a libertine disposition of mind, which prompts men to cry down religion, when they want to break its bonds asunder, and to get loose from its restraints. They who in their conduct pay no regard to the obligations of religion, think it their interest that no such obligations should exist. To such men the laws of religion are chains and fetters. Religion opposes their passions, vices, and corruptions; and they oppose its principles and doctrines. But as the cause of vice and libertinism cannot
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be vindicated, nor that of religion and virtue suffer, by serious argumentation ; they find it necessary to attack the one, and defend the other, by the arts of ridicule, the best friend of a bad cause, and to supply the place of reasoning with profane contempt.

I shall at present observe how unreasonable is the conduct of those who mock or ridicule the doctrines or duties of religion.

And, 1st, Let us inquire into the nature and genius of our religion ; and examine, whether its principles, its doctrines and precepts, are the proper objects of reproach ; or whether they are not such as the common reason of mankind must ever justify and approve.

The Christian religion teaches us, That there is a supreme, eternal, and infinite Being, who created the world, and superintends it by his providence : that he presides over all nature ; is in a particular manner governor of the intellectual and moral world ; and has given laws to us his rational creatures, to which he requires our obedience ; and will approve and reward, or condemn and punish, according to our observance or violation of them : that when vice and superstition had prevailed among all nations, and introduced a total degeneracy and an universal corruption of manners, God sent into the world a person under the high character of its *Saviour*, with clear evidences of a divine authority, to recal mankind, by his instructions and example, into the ways of virtue ; to lead them into the practice of whatever can reform, rectify, and refine human nature ; to elevate it to its highest perfection, and conduct us to the nearest approach to that infinitely glorious Being, who is the original and standard of all excellence ; and thus to lay the sure foundation of both the present and future felicity of mankind.

Whoever looks into the gospel, must see, that its great aim and design is the reformation and happiness of human nature. It recommends and enjoins all the duties of piety towards God, an awful veneration of his majesty, humble gratitude for his mercies, perfect resignation to his will, a firm confidence in his goodness, and

and the constant imitation of him in all the virtues of a good life. It requires an inviolable observance of all the duties suited to the social condition of men; of justice, fidelity, integrity of manners, and universal benevolence. It lays down such rules for our moral conduct, as are in their nature adapted to secure and promote reputation, health, prosperity, private peace of mind, and public esteem. It particularly insists upon those virtues and duties which regard the order, safety, and welfare of society: forbidding the indulgence of any private gratifications that may be injurious or detrimental to others: requiring all to fulfil the duties of their respective stations; to employ their talents in honest labours, or public services; to be just and merciful in disposition and in practice; to cultivate humane and friendly affections: not to limit our good-will or kind offices within the narrow bounds of a neighbourhood, a sect, or party; but to widen the sphere of our benevolence, to extend it to all ranks and denominations, and to consider every man as our neighbour and our brother.

To the rectitude of these precepts of religion our conscience and judgment cannot but subscribe. They are manifestly calculated to promote both private and social virtue; and, consequently, to advance what is naturally connected with them, the peace and happiness of every individual, and the public security and welfare of every community.

It may be urged, that the Christian system contains other particulars besides those moral precepts;—such as certain doctrines, which the light of nature could not, or but imperfectly, discover; and also, certain instituted rites of external religion. But still the great object of the Author of Christianity was, the establishment of moral virtue; and all its doctrines and its rites are plainly subservient to this great end, and have a moral influence and tendency, without which they are declared to be of no significance. We are assured that it will be in vain to plead hereafter, before our heavenly Judge, that we have assented to his doctrines, and complied with

his external institutions, if we have not lived up to the end and design of them : he will not upon these terms accept, but reject us as workers of iniquity.

What is there, then, in this abstract of religion, unbeseeming the wisdom of God, or ill-adapted to the nature and necessities of men ? What is there that is not a most reasonable service, suited to our best notions of the Deity, and conducive to the highest perfection and happiness of mankind ? It has indeed been the fate of the Christian institution, to have been often misapprehended ; as is evident from the multiplicity of sects that have appeared in different periods and parts of the world. It has been often misrepresented by the artful attempts of its opposers, and not seldom perhaps in the mistaken defences of its friends. Under the pretended sanction of religion, incredible doctrines have been imposed, and the most immoral practices authorized. With this venerable name, the superstitious sanctify their follies, and the enthusiast consecrates his conceits. Some seem to place all religion in an inflexible adherence to opinions merely speculative : others adopt absurd practical errors ; some expressing their love of God, by hating and persecuting their brethren, and, from mistaken notions of religion, pursuing practices which religion was meant to reform and suppress. But it were an endless and ungrateful labour to enumerate all the corruptions of Religion which have dishonoured that sacred name, and exposed it to the insults of those who either have not discernment or inclination to distinguish true religion from the various misrepresentations of it. But when we view religion in a just light ; when we see its native form, its genuine features, without the dress of either superstition or enthusiasm : it will appear, like its great Author, in perfect beauty, the object of universal veneration.

2dly, But further to evidence the unreasonableness of this practice of scoffing at religion, let us consider its consequences to society.

That the peace, happiness, and prosperity of any community, are derived from the general observance
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of the duties of religion, of fidelity, justice, benevolence, and other private and social virtues; that these render a people happy and secure; and that the contrary vices are the sources of public disorder and ruin—is a truth which comes to us confirmed by the wisdom of all ages, and the experience of all histories. This truth even the adversaries of religion acknowledge, when they assert it to be only a political engine, framed for the security and good government of society. If these virtues, then, are admitted to be necessary and essential to the happiness of society, religion must also be necessary; for no other principle can lay us under an equal obligation to the observance of them, or equally restrain from the opposite vices. Human laws, unsupported by religion, would lose, in a great measure, their force and authority, and be utterly unable to preserve public order and peace: For if obedience to those laws be derived from no higher principle than the fear of human justice; then, whoever thinks himself secret enough to escape, artful enough to elude, or powerful enough to contend with it, can be under no restraint from any act of fraud, violence, or iniquity that ungoverned inclination may suggest. Every day furnishes fresh examples of the little regard paid to human laws, where the violation of them is supposed to be no offence against religion. Whereas, if men are governed by principles of conscience; if they act under the awe of a superior justice; if they consider the laws of religion as the laws of an Almighty Being, who will infinitely reward the observance, or punish the violation, of them; whom no artifice can deceive, and no power oppose;—such considerations must suggest the most effectual incitements to virtue; must influence not only our manners but our inclinations; and not only regulate our outward deportment, but reach the heart, and purify that source and spring of our actions.

But, on the other hand, take away the restraints of religion, and the torrent of public iniquity would soon extend far beyond its usual channel, would break down the fences of human laws, and spread desolation around.

And nothing can more effectually contribute to this overflowing of ungodliness, than scoffing at religion, treating it as an object of pleasantry, and ridiculing its obligations. This is acting up to the folly of him described by Solomon, who scatters arrows, firebrands, and death; and says, "Am I not in sport?" Should it ever obtain as a fashion to represent religion as a matter merely political; to resolve the distinctions of good and evil into political contrivance only; to consider a future life as a visionary scene; and to paint sin in such inviting colours, as to hide its infamy and guilt;—we shall see it no longer fly to covert and retirement; impiety shall lift up its head with open insolence; the sinner be no longer concerned to veil his guilt; and even the good man may be tempted to quit a virtuous singularity, and yield to the prevailing stream. Should such a spirit of profaneness go out into the world; and a contempt of conscience and duty become a fashionable principle of action, and vice in its various shapes be pursued without shame or censure, the most fatal consequences to society must inevitably ensue. To scoff at the laws of religion, then, is to revile what we ought to reverence, and to sport where the wise and good would be inclined to mourn.

Let us, in the *next* place, examine whether the irreligious scoffer acts with any reasonable views of personal advantage. He may possibly enjoy the vanity of displaying a genius, or acquiring a name: but certain it is, that no ease or comfort of mind can be derived from irreligious principles; and that he who forms his conduct by the dictates of religion and conscience, takes the method that bids fairest for happiness even in this world. But if we take the next into consideration, it will appear beyond contradiction, that the fear of the LORD only is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. The hardiest infidel pretends not to prove the impossibility of our future existence: the consequent possibility, therefore, of a state of retribution, demonstrates the folly of the profane scoffer. Should we even admit (what indeed cannot be admitted) that the evidences for and
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against a future state are equal, and that the arguments on both sides balance each other; yet the danger is infinitely disproportionate and unequal. If there be no regions that lie beyond the grave, no future tribunal to which we shall be summoned; if we are to lose our existence in death, and become as if we had never been;—then the case of the righteous and wicked will be alike, and they shall both lie down undistinguished in equal insensibility. But if there be another scene in which we are to appear again, and live for ever; if there is a God, who will judge the world; if there will be a day when men shall rise again, and give an account of their works; how widely different then will be their condition? Where then will the ungodly and the sinner appear? May not the profane scoffer then expect to be rejected by that great and good Being whom he had before renounced, and to feel the resentment of that power he had often despised? The danger, then, on the side of religion and virtue, is nothing; but on that of vice, it is infinite.

From these reflections it may appear, that we ought not to entertain less reverence for religion, because some are hardy enough, by unfair representations and false colouring, to endeavour to expose it to mockery and contempt.

Far, far from us be the practice of those who thus sport with the honour of their Maker, the happiness of their fellow creatures, and their own salvation. Let us rather unite with the friends of religion, to protect the most venerable name, and support the best cause in the world; let us not fail in our duty to a religion which fair inquiry will convince us came down from heaven, and is of divine extraction; let us live under a constant sense of a superior Being inspecting and presiding over us; let us remember, that they that honour him, he will honour; let us, in our whole conduct, preserve the most awful regard for him and his laws, however traduced and vilified by the licentious and profane:—then may we hope, that we shall hereafter be numbered with the children of God; and that our lot will be among the saints in heaven.

S E R M O N V.

On Mysteries in RELIGION.

Preached on Trinity-Sunday.

2 PET. iii. 16.

— *In which are some things hard to be understood.*

WHAT is in the text asserted of the epistles of St. Paul, is in some measure applicable to other parts of the sacred writings. For though, in points essential to salvation, the scripture speaks in the most intelligible language, and the rules of life it lays down are clear and perspicuous, *a lantern to our feet, and a light unto our paths*; yet it is not to be dissembled, that the scripture has its obscurities, its mysterious doctrines, which necessarily arise from the sublimity of the subjects, and the limitation of human capacities. A revelation which delivers doctrines relative to the nature, counsels, and attributes, of that Supreme Being who inhabits immensity, must contain matters too high, too elevated, to be clearly discerned by human understanding. When, therefore, a system of religion comes recommended to us under the character of a Divine Revelation, if it is supported by all the external evidence that the nature of revelation will admit, and if the internal excellence and purity of its moral precepts and instructions are worthy of a divine original, we ought not to reject any of its doctrines on account of their being hard to be understood, until we have first considered and examined them with that attention which the importance of the subject demands, and with that humility and diffidence which

which become creatures of an imperfect and limited understanding.

There are many things which do not oppose reason, yet are far above its ability to comprehend. The weakness of human reason obliges us to submit to the acknowledgement of this general truth ; and yet, in the application of it to particular instances, the pride of reason inclines us to disown it. We cannot but be sensible of the defects of our rational powers, and the scantiness of our knowledge ; and yet we vainly endeavour to *find out the Almighty to perfection*. We are weak enough to measure his nature by our own ; and where *his ways are not as our ways*, we are apt to think them *unequal* ; and where his revelation is not adapted to our reason, we suppose it to be erroneous.

I shall at present observe, 1st, That the difficulty of apprehending some mysterious doctrines of the Christian faith, is no argument against the credibility of them ; and, 2^{dly}, That the moral doctrines of the holy Scriptures, which we are most concerned to know, are revealed and proposed to us with plainness and perspicuity.

As the Christian revelation comes to us confirmed by the evidence of miracles, prophecies, and all the external circumstances of credibility that can be required ; and as the internal excellence of its moral precepts is every way worthy of the Divine Being ; in this case, though it contains some doctrines too sublime for our apprehension, yet this is not a sufficient ground for rejecting them. For, notwithstanding all the pretended sufficiency, all the boasted powers of human reason, what is there that our limited intellect can fully comprehend ? What can we attain by the most attentive and unwearied pursuit of knowledge, but to discover how little can be known ? Human reason, however enlarged, has its bounds which it cannot pass ; and beyond its widest and most extended view, there lie an infinity of objects which its eye cannot reach. And even within the circle of its knowledge, it has but an imperfect discernment : it sees only the surface as it were of things, but cannot penetrate into their interior powers and principles. Even in
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those works of nature where our knowledge is most perfect, even there we must be sensible of its imperfection; in these there are some subtle intricacies which we cannot unravel, there is always a depth we can never fathom. We can only guess a little, understand less, but completely comprehend nothing. Every thing within or without us may remind us of the limitation of our understanding. The whole creation abounds with mysteries; and the most common and familiar objects, the most contemptible worm or weed that we tread under our feet, if we attempt to investigate their secret qualities, will present obstacles not to be surmounted by the ablest inquirers, as intricate and mysterious as any article of faith.

If, then, we understand not earthly, how shall we understand heavenly things? If we cannot fully comprehend the material world, or the most familiar objects of sense, must not the knowledge of spiritual beings, of objects which lie remote from the observation of our senses, be confessed to be too wonderful and excellent for us? If every part of nature is big with wonders impenetrable to our reason, why should we expect, that revelation, which proceeds from the same Author of nature, should be entirely exempt from them!

Let it also be observed, that mysterious doctrines are such only with relation to our understanding: that many propositions in the sciences, for instance, may appear unintelligible to one person, and yet may be familiar to another; and, for the same reason, many doctrines which are above the capacity of human understanding, may yet lie level and obvious to intelligences of an order superior to man: that as many things seem hard to be understood by us in a state of infancy, which yet are evident to our riper years and maturer judgment; so also in a future life, when our spirits will be made perfect, we may have the clearest discernment of some truths, which, in our present state of minority, seem involved in the deepest darkness. All creatures are infinite in their nature, and
circumscribed

circumscribed in their capacities; and consequently an infinity of truths may be known to the supreme all-perfect Mind, which the most perfect created understanding may never be able to conceive. To assert, then, that our inability to apprehend mysteries, is an argument against their truth, is to suppose in us a capacity of apprehending all truth: it is to make ourselves equal with God; and, in effect, to assert that our understanding is infinite like his. Whereas to us, indeed, all nature is full of mysteries: but to Him nothing in nature can be mysterious; to his eye all things are equally clear; and all things lie naked before him, without any veil, without any darkness or obscurity.

We may have the clearest evidence of the certainty of some truths, which yet may appear inexplicable, may be interwoven and entangled with difficulties which we can never unfold. Thus, with regard to the doctrine of the holy Trinity, the scripture assures us, that God has an only Son, who for our redemption came down from heaven; that he has an Holy Spirit, who inspired the apostles, and is assisting to good men in the work of their salvation. Thus far the scripture has clearly informed us: but in what manner the Son and Holy Spirit are one with the Father; how they were derived from him, or are united to him; has not been revealed, and is too mysterious for our apprehension.

The case is the same in many other certain uncontested truths. It is acknowledged, *e. g.* that this world, this globe of earth which we inhabit, has not existed from eternity; that it is not an underived, self-existent being, but was created and formed by an Almighty Agent. But the manner of its birth, by what art it could be brought forth, by what wisdom or power produced from nonentity into existence, is by us, and perhaps by all created beings, utterly inconceivable. So also of our own existence, of the vital union of the soul and body, we cannot doubt; but who can explain what is the spring of life, or the principle of motion

and activity within us? Who can say, by what ties and ligaments spirit and matter are conjoined, or by what contact a material and an immaterial substance can reciprocally act upon each other? If, then, we are a mystery to ourselves, if our own nature is concealed from us, no wonder that we cannot by searching find out the Almighty to perfection; no wonder that doctrines relative to that Being whom heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain should appear mysterious and incomprehensible to our limited capacities; no wonder that HE who infinitely transcends our nature, should infinitely transcend our conceptions of him; and that many truths respecting his being, providence, and attributes, should like himself, dwell in a light, which no man can approach, inaccessible to human understanding.

Let it be further observed, that we have no right to a revelation, and have no claim, consequently, to any further information than the Divine Wisdom may think fit to communicate. For what God has revealed, we have reason to be thankful; for what he has withheld, we have no right to remonstrate. Whatever revelation he is pleased to impart, is the effect of his goodness; and it is as consistent with this attribute, not to reveal to us at present all mysteries, and all knowledge, as it is not to communicate all the felicity our nature is capable of receiving. God, questionless, for the best and wisest reasons, has given us an imperfect view of things, and afforded sufficient evidence of some doctrines; and yet hath withheld the light necessary to clear up all the difficulties and obscurities that surround them. These reasons may not appear to us, as the Supreme Being is under no obligation to accommodate all his ways and thoughts to our capacities, and to confine himself within the sphere of our understanding. In a future state, we hope to have a more ample portion of knowledge communicated to us, and much clearer and more extensive prospects. And in that state we may hope to go on in a perpetual progress towards supreme perfection, and be for ever making gradual advances in knowledge,

knowledge, in wisdom, and in happiness. In the mean time, whilst we are travelling to those regions of happiness and wisdom, let us be content to pursue the directions of that light which the Father of lights has held out to us; which is sufficient to be a *lantern unto our feet*, and to guide them into the way of peace; though not bright enough to give us a clear discernment of every thing we would wish to know.

The Christian revelation was not meant to furnish matter for the inquiries of speculation, not meant to gratify the vanity of worldly wisdom; but to lay down a plan of moral conduct, to direct our practice, to form our manners, and to mend the heart. The Divine Being has neither by reason nor revelation favoured us with the same information concerning his nature or providence, as concerning our duty. In the duties of life we are sufficiently instructed; we know enough to regulate our morals and make us wise unto salvation.

Which leads me to observe, *2dly*, That the doctrines of the holy scriptures which we are most concerned to know, are revealed and proposed to us with plainness and perspicuity.

As our blessed LORD came into the world to reveal all necessary truth, and was pleased to have his doctrine transmitted to succeeding ages in writings which were to be the rule of faith and manners, it was agreeable to his wisdom to appoint those writings to be delivered with distinctness and perspicuity; and nothing seems more inconsistent with the divine goodness and wisdom, than to suppose, that by his appointment they are written with such obscurity as to be intelligible only to a few. *If our gospel be hid*, says St. Paul, *it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.* As religion is the equal concern of all, and men of very unequal capacities are under an equal obligation to find out the way of life, it will follow, that to acquire the knowledge of all that is necessary to salvation, cannot be a matter of subtle and difficult speculation, but only of

integrity and sincere inquiry. And certain it is, that, let our capacities be ever so different, if we attend to the scripture with an honest heart, determined to obey its plain precepts, and to believe its doctrines as far as they are understood by us, we then follow a safe and infallible guide, who will either conduct us unto all truth, or at least secure us from all errors that might be fatal to our salvation. As religion is necessary to the happiness of all, the knowledge of it must be attainable by all, in an honest and diligent use of the intellectual powers which God has given them, and of the light which his providence affords for their information. And accordingly we find the chief principles, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, appear in it with clear and irresistible evidence. Such are the doctrines concerning the being and providence of God; concerning the necessity of repentance, and obedience to his commands; concerning the certainty of a life to come, and of a future judgment; concerning our blessed Lord as the Saviour and Judge of mankind. In short, the knowledge of religion, so much at least as is necessary, is, we may be assured, always within the reach of an honest mind.

Too diligent we can never indeed be in our inquiries into those parts of scripture which may form our morals, and impress the mind with worthy conceptions of the Supreme Being, or benevolent affections to our fellow-creatures. To meditate on the law of God in such a manner as to be thereby prevailed on to conform our hearts and lives to the rules it prescribes, is an employment most worthy of man, and most acceptable to God; and will always be productive of present satisfaction, and future felicity. But it is not necessary to understand those things which are hard to be understood: It is not needful that those truths should be distinctly apprehended by us which we have not abilities to apprehend; or that the eye of reason should discern those objects which the Author of reason has placed far above out of its sight. Our merciful Creator has consulted the health of our souls in his revelation, in the same manner

manner as he has provided for the subsistence of our bodies in the constitution of nature, by appointing what is most needful and salutary to be most obvious and common; whilst what would only serve to gratify curiosity or taste, lies more remote, and is not to be acquired without more difficult and painful researches.

Let us then chiefly attend to what God has most clearly revealed. In the precepts of Christianity there is not even the shadow of a mystery. Nothing is more clear in scripture than the commandments of God; nothing more mysterious, than his nature and essence. Where he has thrown a veil over his nature, we must necessarily continue ignorant, or be humbly content to see darkly. But we know what is enough for us to know, that it is our duty, and will be our happiness, to love, adore, imitate, and obey, that infinite, unknown, yet well-known Being, the immensity of whose perfections the span of reason can never measure; whose excellencies we can never speak of without detracting from them; who is infinitely above what we are, infinitely above what we can think: that we ought therefore to make up in veneration what we want in knowledge, and with all the powers of our soul to adore and praise him who is above all praise, and to ascribe to him, as is most due, all honour and adoration.

SERMON

S E R M O N. VI.

Parable of the TALENTS.

LUKE XIX. 16,—19.

Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant : because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

THE parable from which these words are taken, instructs us to consider the Supreme Being as lord and proprietor of the world, and ourselves as his servants or stewards, to whom he has distributed such talents, such powers, possessions, or endowments, as may fit and qualify us for the various stations and duties to which his providence appoints us. These are committed to us in the nature of a trust, for the management of which we must account to the donor. If we acquit ourselves with fidelity and diligence in this probationary employment, we shall be entitled to far greater expressions of his regard : but if we squander our Lord's goods ; if we are wasteful, or even negligent ; if we are unfaithful, or even unprofitable servants, we may expect to become the objects of his displeasure, or, in the language of the parable, be cast into utter darkness, where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The possessions of this world we erroneously call our own. We hold them only in trust, and under certain reservations, so as to be accountable for the disposal of them.

them. The property of them, strictly speaking, is so far from being vested in us, that we have no certain term in them, and are removeable at the will of our Lord. Even the produce of them is not so far ours, that we may use or abuse it at pleasure; but for this also we stand accountable. And we are informed, there will be a time when our LORD will come and reckon with his servants, and a strict account will be demanded of whatever has been intrusted to our care. He has himself assured us, that the examination will turn upon the manner in which his servants have employed the talents delivered to them; and they who have not faithfully discharged their duty in this article, shall be considered as betrayers of their trust, shall forfeit all claim to the favour of their LORD, and incur the punishment due to their negligence or injustice.

The day of inquiry, indeed, may be very distant. This world is appointed to be our state of probation; nor will our account be called for, till it shall be no more. Many years may roll on, many ages may intervene, before the last awful day of reckoning come; but come it most assuredly will, and be decisive of our everlasting fate.

In the parable from whence my text is taken, our LORD, under the similitude of a man travelling into a far country, allots to his servants different rewards, proportioned to their respective improvement of the talents delivered to them. The good servant whose pound had gained ten pounds, received this approbation and recompense: *Well done, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And when the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds, he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.*

In this parable a distinction is made between the two servants, who were each of them diligent and faithful; but to the superior diligence of the one a reward proportionably greater was assigned. The moral of this well-known parable is evidently meant to excite attention to the duties of religion; to animate us to a continual

tinual perseverance and progress in piety and goodness; to inform us, that our future rewards in heaven will be proportioned to our religious diligence upon earth; that no good action will be lost; that every virtue, and every degree of virtue, shall have its reward; and that superior assiduity in the duties of religion, will be recompensed with an ampler portion of happiness.

In order to invite your compliance with this intention of the parable, and to recommend a continual progression and improvement in goodness, let it be in the first place considered, that such improvement and progression are absolutely necessary even to our security. We are no where informed, and cannot consequently determine, what is the lowest degree of goodness God will accept; or what exact quantity of good works, what precise measure of obedience, may just suffice to insure our salvation.

It concerns us, therefore, to take heed that we do not deceive ourselves, by a too parsimonious obedience, by a too penurious discharge of our duty; since a mistaken frugality in this point, or a too partial estimate of our performances, may be fatal, and for ever deprive us of a future reward. If we are remiss, and fall short of our duty, the prospect before us is too dreadful for description. Whereas, on the other hand, if we should exceed what we may apprehend to be the strict measure of obedience; if we should labour more abundantly in duty than may be absolutely necessary to salvation: what will be the consequence? Will our pious labours profit us nothing? Have we cleansed our hearts in vain? Have our hours of virtue been misemployed and lost? No; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. If we sow bountifully, we shall reap also bountifully. Our future harvest will be proportioned to the moral culture of our minds. Every virtuous improvement will turn to account; not a single good action can be unprofitable to the agent, whatever it may be to others: not even a good intention shall lose its reward.

The happiness of heaven is so inestimable, that we cannot be at too much pains to secure so great a prize;

we cannot be too solicitous to run the short race of life so as to obtain it. We cannot be too careful lest the delusion of security should tempt us to loiter and abate our speed, and thus disappoint our hopes for ever. Our hearts are sometimes fallacious monitors, and make too partial reports of our progress and proficiency in virtue; and it is easy to be deceived into too favourable sentiments of our own worth and goodness, if we give ear to the suggestions of self-love, and to the prejudices we naturally form in our own favour.

To guard against this self-deception, and the fatal consequences attending it, and to make our calling and election sure, we must take care not to grow weary in well-doing; not to stand still or lose ground; but to go on from virtue to virtue, to put forth all our strength, and exert all our powers, in pressing forward to the mark for the *prize of our high calling*. Never must we fix to ourselves bounds which we are not to pass, never stop short in our progress towards perfection. For, notwithstanding all our attention and labour, never can we come up to that standard of perfection at which we should constantly aim. Never can we make so great a progress in goodness, but we may still go farther. He who has got the farthest, is still short of what he might attain to. He who thinks it unnecessary to be better than he is, is, we may be assured, not so good as he ought to be. A religious state should be always progressive; and is in scripture compared to some vegetable productions, which, small and contracted at first, gradually unfold themselves, and advance to their appointed maturity and perfection.

But virtue, though capable of perpetual growth, will not grow at all without constant culture. As acquisitions in science are not to be preserved, much less improved, without attention, industry, and a due cultivation of our minds; the same may be observed of moral or religious attainments: they cannot continue long at one stay; if they are not exerted, they will be diminished and impaired; like the talent taken from the slothful servant, if they are not improved, they will be lost.

But a further consideration to be attended to is, that by a continued progression and advancement in religion and virtue, we not only consult our security, but we directly add to the measure of our happiness. Virtue has a natural tendency to felicitate the mind; and yields the truest and purest enjoyment, partly in this world, and much more in the next. Our happiness, as far as it is in our own power, depends, through every stage of our being, on wisdom and moral goodness. These are the most valuable treasures; Heaven's choicest, best gifts. If we possess these, we are to a certain degree in possession of happiness. If we abound in them, we are rich in the noblest sense. These far exceed, in intrinsic value, all that the world has to offer.

Would we then approach to the highest happiness of our nature? Let us walk in the paths of virtue which lead to it. Every step of our progress will conduct us nearer to it, and open to our view some new scene of enjoyment.

But, besides the enjoyment resulting from the nature of virtue, the Judge of the whole earth has informed us, that he will hereafter assign different allotments of happiness to us in proportion to the measure of our virtue, and the improvement of our talents. That God should allot different measures of his favour and bounty to his creatures in proportion to their respective moral improvement, is perfectly consonant to justice, reason, and equity. For though human frailty can have no claim of right to an eternity of happiness; though the lowest place in heaven is far above the merits of the purest saint; yet whatever motive induces the Divine Being to reward the obedience of his creatures, the same will prevail with him to adjust our reward to our obedience, and to observe a proportion in the allotments of his bounty. Is virtue a proper object of his approbation and regard? Superior virtue may then expect an ampler portion of favour. Our Saviour accordingly assures us, that in his Father's house are many mansions. We read of some that shall be greatest, some that shall be least, in the kingdom of heaven. And the apostle represents the
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the blessed under these distinctions, shining with various lustre, as one star differeth from another star in glory.

Whether, then, we consider the happiness by nature annexed to virtue, or the rewards consequent upon it by the appointment of Heaven, certain it is, that none of its labours can fail of a suitable recompence, and that the degree of our bliss will be commensurate to that of our improvement. And what greater encouragement can we need to animate us to our utmost exertions? All the advantages of nature or of fortune, our knowledge, our leisure, our every ability or opportunity of doing good to others, or of becoming good ourselves, are to be considered as talents intrusted to our management.

Let us, then, sometimes call ourselves to an account, and impartially examine what proficiency we have made in goodness; how we have acquitted ourselves in the duties required from us; whether we have acted up to the powers granted us, of becoming better ourselves, or of making others happier; how we have employed the portion of wealth, wisdom, or power, with which we have been intrusted; what use we have made of the advantages of our education, fortune, or station; and whether we have endeavoured to promote the wise and good ends for which our Maker bestowed them. If, upon fair enquiry, we find that we have endeavoured to act as good and faithful servants, and to improve the talents committed to our charge, we may then with joy expect the coming of our LORD, conscious of our integrity, and assured of his approbation. But, on the other hand, what bitter reflections, and what awful fears, must this retrospect create in the mind of the unprofitable servant, unprofitable both to himself and others, whose talent has produced no improvement, has added nothing either to his own virtue, or their happiness? The parable will inform him of his fate, if his LORD find him thus unfruitful.

And here it must be indeed acknowledged, that this is in a greater or less degree the condition of us all. For who among us can say that we have no sin? that we have not left undone things that we ought to have done?

Which of us has improved every gift of heaven to its utmost extent? or if we have been faithful in some talents, have we not misemployed or been neglectful of others? The best, when our LORD comes to reckon with us, will have much to be forgiven; and in that great day of account, we must make our last appeal, not to the merit of our service, but to the mercy of our Judge.

But let it be observed, that if, according to the parable, utter darkness is to be the portion of him who lays by his talent unimproved, yet has preserved it unimpaired; what must be the severer doom of those who profusely squander it in acts of dishonour and disobedience to God? Our Saviour has in the parable described only a crime of omission in neglecting the talent. But how many proceed still farther in guilt; and pervert those gifts which the goodness of God has conferred on them, into occasions of offending him? How often may we see superior talents and abilities engaged in the interest of vice, and unhappily employed in disobeying and dishonouring him that gave them? And if the unfruitful servant, who was indolent only, or careless, was condemned to utter darkness, what direful sentence may we expect will be pronounced upon the aggravated crime of those who have been active, industrious, and diligent in vice?

To such sinners one consolation indeed yet remains, that to the penitent the gate of mercy is never shut; that however multiplied or aggravated their sins may have been, yet if they are forsaken, and repented of, they will not be the occasions of their condemnation. They may indeed, and most certainly will, diminish their future portion of happiness, if they are not careful, by superior diligence, to redeem the time they have lost; to recover their ground, and press forward with renewed speed towards the prize.

Let us then consider what encouragement we have to a continued perseverance and progress in the duties of religion. Let us remember that God is able to repay to the uttermost those who serve him; and that our re-
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ward will be proportioned to our obedience. Let our labours in his service be ever so long, they can never be in vain ; but the sooner we begin, and the more diligently we labour, the more certainly we shall obtain a reward, and the more glorious it will be when attained. Let us then press forward towards perfection, knowing that our portion will be glory, and honour, and immortality.

And happy, happy sure, we must think the lot of human nature, if the religious attention and industry of a few years can purchase for us the prize of immortal life, a prize as far above our conception as it is beyond our desert. Happy servants, whom their LORD will thus bountifully reward ! Blessed stewards ! if the improvement of the talents entrusted to our care can entitle us to that gracious sentence : *Well done, good and faithful servants : because ye have been faithful in few things, I will make you rulers over many things ; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

The Prayer of AGUR confidered and explained.

PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

THOUGH it is our duty, and ought to be our first care, as Christians, and heirs of immortality, to make provision for a future life, and to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven ; yet reason and nature tell us, whilst we are in the world, that the world must be our concern, though not our principal concern ; that its innocent enjoyments are good, though not our supreme good. We are not to put too literal a construction on those precepts in scripture which direct us to take no thought for to-morrow ; not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth ; not to labour for the meat which perisheth, and the like : which, far from prohibiting all attention to the necessary cares of the world, can be understood only as admonitions to give our supreme eternal interests the first place in our affections ; to let all temporal cares be only of inferior consideration, and not to suffer them to exclude the more important concerns of futurity. The example in the text may direct us to request a moderate portion of the conveniencies of life ; *Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me : lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord ?*

or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I shall, *1st*, consider, the meaning and import of this petition; and, *2dly*, the dangers and disadvantages which, in a moral or religious view, attend the two extremes of affluence and indigence which are here deprecated.

The words in the text have sometimes been supposed to be a petition for a middle state of life, one equidistant from the extremes of poverty and opulence, and least exposed to the temptations and seducements which are peculiar to each. Such a situation may perhaps be generally esteemed most eligible, whether we would wish to acquire a virtuous or a tranquil state of mind. But the wisdom of the supreme Ruler of the world alone knows what is most conducive to the well-being of the general system, and to the particular welfare of individuals. He assigns our station; it is our duty to conform to it. A middle state of life cannot be a proper subject of all mens petitions to Heaven; for human life requires a distinction of stations. In Society there must be subordination. It must be the province of some to preside and govern, and the duty of others to submit and serve: for the political, like the natural body, cannot subsist without a variety of members, employed in different functions, and offices, mutually dependant, and all co-operating and conspiring to the preservation and health of the whole. Whence it follows, that the petition in the text cannot be understood to propose one fixed standard or measure of fortune, as the proper object of every man's desires, or the proper subject of his prayers; but may mean only such a competency, such a convenient porportion of temporal supplies, as is suited to our respective stations.

And it is a reasonable request we may all make to God; not that he would place us all in equal rank of life, in which case society could not subsist; but that he would vouchsafe us such a measure of temporal good things, as is accommodated to the station we are to fill,
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and the dependents for which we are to provide.— Riches, poverty or competence, are relative terms, and cannot be accurately fixed, without reference to our condition or situation in the world. What is affluence and abundance in one station of life, may only be a competence, or indigence, in another. The necessities and wants of men must consequently vary; not only their imaginary, but their real wants; not only such as, by ambition, avarice, or luxury, they create to themselves, but such as rise out of their situation and character. He whom his Maker has appointed to the lowest offices of life, to go forth to his work and to his labour until the evening; doomed, like our first parent, in the sweat of his face to eat his bread; when he petitions heaven to give him the food convenient for him, may mean no more than to ask the enjoyment of health and strength, and the divine blessing upon the labours of his honest industry. But he to whom birth, or fortune, or more properly Providence, has allotted pre-eminence and distinction, may by the same petition be understood to request such a portion of wealth, as will with decency support his authority and character, will correspond to the demands of his station, and supply him with such means of liberality and beneficence as it requires from him.

In this sense, therefore, the petition in the text may be applicable to general use, and suited to all orders and distinctions of men.

And this medium between superfluity and want, which we are here instructed to pray for; this competency, this food convenient for us, neither above nor below the demands of our station; is not only productive perhaps of as much happiness as life can supply, but is also most eligible, considered in a religious view; as may appear by observing, *2dly*, The moral disadvantages which attend the two extremes of affluence and indigence deprecated in the text.

And, *1st*, let us observe the moral disadvantages attending affluence. Various vices, certain it is, are apt

apt to take root and flourish in the rich soil and sun-shine of prosperity and affluence, which would never shoot up, or would soon wither and die, in the shade of indigence, or in the rigorous season of adversity. Amidst the numerous temptations of opulence, many have lost that integrity which they would have preserved and held fast in an humbler station. Many have abandoned themselves to the indulgence of irregular passions, merely because they had the means of indulgence in their power. Riches particularly tempt us to forget our Maker, and to say, *Who is the Lord?* In the midst of prosperity, when we are receiving a continued succession of favours from the bounty of Providence, it is then we are least apt to consider from whom we received, and to whom we are accountable for them. We are most unmindful of God, while he is giving us all things richly to enjoy; and pay the least acknowledgments to his goodness, when we experience it the most.

On the other hand, a sense and feeling of want is a constant monitor, ever reminding us of our dependence, ever calling upon us to look up to HIM by whose goodness and mercy we subsist. Whilst our circumstances are only equal to the character we sustain, and adjusted to our rank and condition of life, the care of heaven is visible in the successive supplies we receive. Conscious of our own weakness, of the various accidents by which our labours may be defeated, and of the need we have of the assistance and favour of God, we are led to contemplate and acknowledge our dependence on him, to ascribe every success to his concurrence, and every escape to his protection. Every reflection upon the mercies we have received, the dangers we have escaped, and the difficulties we have overcome, in our journey through the world, suggests to us how wonderfully God has supported and brought us on in our way.

This sense of dependence naturally creates in us an unwillingness to offend, and an inclination to serve and please him. But he whom affluence exempts from the apprehensions of want or danger, has not the same

inducements to consider the need he has of the divine assistance. Trusting to appearances, and secure, as he may flatter himself, in an independent provision, he is less concerned to solicit the favour of Providence. *When thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then beware,* says Moses to the Israelites, *lest thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God.* Amidst the fulness of plenty, we too often exclude from our thoughts the consideration of that Being from whom we received it; are too apt to trust in our goods, and boast in the multitude of our riches: *to say unto gold, Thou art my hope; and, with the rich man in the parable, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease.*

Thus affluence or riches, multiplied beyond the exigencies of our station, withdraw and alienate the heart from God, and render us inattentive to the duties of religion, by removing or weakening the foundation of religion, a sense of our dependence on the providence and protection of Heaven.

But further: Opulence tempts us to be as forgetful of our neighbour as of our God; and, by not suffering afflictions ourselves, to be less disposed to feel for others. They who have smarted under the rod of affliction, are observed to be most susceptible of tenderness for the afflicted, most disposed to feel and relieve their sorrows. Affliction humanises and softens the heart, and gives it a taste for the serious pleasures of charity and pity. But this amiable disposition is counteracted by affluence, which invites to a variety of pleasures, and inclines us to shun whatever may interfere with those pursuits.

But here we must observe, that all indeed do not yield to the temptations of riches. There are many exceptions; many who, in the midst of affluence, are neither unmindful of their God, nor their neighbour; many who make a virtuous and laudable use of that distinction which riches create, and add largely to their own, by generously contributing to the happiness of others.

adly, Poverty, or the want of the decencies and conveniencies of life, has likewise its moral disadvantages and dangers. Of these indeed mankind are sufficiently sensible, and need no exhortations to concur with the supplicant of the text in this part of his prayer. The moral dangers attending poverty are expressed in these words; *lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*; that is, lest I be tempted to supply my wants by unlawful methods, by fraud, injustice, perjury, and the like; crimes which poverty may in some degree extenuate, but cannot excuse. For we ought to know with the apostle, both *how to be abased, and how to abound*; to acquiesce in all the dispensations of Providence; to let the will of Heaven be ours; and to retain our integrity, when we have lost every thing else.

Yet the temptations in a state of indigence, it cannot be disowned, are urgent, and too often prevail. When a man finds himself constrained to descend from his station and take a lower place, and to suffer all the perhaps unpitied hardships and afflictions attendant on such a change, it requires a peculiarly right frame, and happy disposition of mind, to submit with patient fortitude to such humiliation, and to reject every gainful temptation that offers to corrupt. If any convenient, though fraudulent expedient should offer to relieve his necessities, human weakness will be strongly urged, with the unjust steward in the gospel, to provide a dishonest subsistence at the expence of his integrity.

Here, too, however, there are many exceptions; many who preserve an invariable sense of duty, and hold fast their integrity amidst the pressures of the narrowest and most distressful circumstances.

If, then, both the extremes of affluence and indigence are thus dangerous, and often fatal, to virtue; the food convenient for us, and adjusted to the exigencies of our station, which the example in the text recommends, will be the proper subject of our petitions to Heaven.

But notwithstanding the peculiar temptations attending the different states of affluence and indigence, certain it is, that as no circumstances of fortune can make us virtuous and good without our own inclination; so in no circumstances is virtue impracticable, if we are well disposed to it. We may be wicked in that medium of convenience prescribed to our desires in the text; or we may preserve the same equal innocence, however our circumstances may vary into either of the extremes. Poverty may produce in us an affection for things above; may give birth to the humble virtues of patience, industry, meekness, resignation; and, amidst the exuberance of wealth, we may exert humanity, benevolence, charity, and be rich in good works. The possessor of riches may become the patron of virtue, by lending it his authority and example; and is enabled to imitate in some measure the beneficence of his heavenly Father, and to supply the place of Providence to his fellow-creatures.

The text may further remind us, that as we are the creatures of God, we are the dependents also on his providence: that to him we should ever look up for protection: that all events are in his hands: that they receive their existence from his appointment or permission: that he is never inattentive to the wants of his faithful servants; never neglectful to administer relief, in the measure and method which his wisdom judges to be most expedient.

These sentiments will lead us to an uncomplaining submission to his appointments, and an equal resignation in all conditions. Are we poor? Have we but a slender portion of the good things (as they are called) of this world? If we cannot by lawful methods advance our station, let us consider it as the post which he has allotted us. And as it is far beyond human wisdom to determine what rank or condition of life would upon the whole be best for us, let us acquiesce in the appointment of our Creator, and piously believe, that the state assigned us by him is the best, if we are careful to make the best use

use of it. We have sufficient grounds to believe; that in all his apparently unequal distributions, in all his providential appointments, he has the good of his creatures in view, and places them in higher or lower situations, according as they appear favourable to their attainment of future happiness. He formed the constitution of the soul, and best knows to what moral disorders it is liable, what regimen will be most conducive to its everlasting health; and the prescriptions of his providence, we may be assured, are always salutary though sometimes severe.

On the other hand, if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them; remember always from whom they are received, and for what ends bestowed; not to support indolence; not to equip the vain, nor pamper the luxurious; not for avarice to hoard, or profligacy to squander. They are given by the Supreme Proprietor with a merciful intention to render us the instruments of his mercy, the dispensers of his bounty, the channels through which his provision for the poor should pass; and to adorn and enrich us with benevolence and liberality in its way to the relief of their indigence; by which means wealth, which often corrupts the heart, and multiplies the incentives to vice, may be turned into an occasion of the happiest and most profitable virtue.

Though God, the common parent of his creatures, is no respecter of persons; though his mercy is over all his works, and his equal care extends to all; yet he appears to have distributed with a very partial and unequal hand his temporal supplies, of which some are altogether destitute, while others seem to riot in too ample a profusion. The design of which was, doubtless, to constitute the rich his stewards for the poor, and through their hands to convey his bounty to them. For which reason, no man's riches or possessions are so much his own, but that the necessitous and indigent have some equitable claim to share in them.

In a word, whatever may be our allotment in the world, let us be piously grateful to Heaven for the blessings we enjoy; let us endeavour to deserve those we want; and let it be the chief object of our attention, by
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a wise and virtuous use of the temporary treasures or possessions intrusted to us in this life, to secure the eternal possessions of the next, and *to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.*

SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

Causes of Propensity to peculiar V I C E S.

HEB. xii. 1.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

TH E Apostle having in the preceding chapter displayed the influence and efficacy of religion as exemplified in the lives of the saints of former times, proceeds in this chapter to an application of his discourse; and to admonish us, after their example, to run with patience the race that is set before us, and to lay aside every weight, i. e. every criminal inclination and affection, which will otherwise, like a weight, retard us, and prevent our reaching the goal. Agreeable to which, by *the sin which doth so easily beset us*, must be understood any particular passion, any favourite vice, which cleaves to our affections, and, like a long garment wrapped about us, may entangle us in our Christian race. We are required, therefore, to put off this particular vice, as racers did their garments in order to run without impediment, so as to obtain the heavenly prize.

Every human mind seems to have some peculiar character impressed upon it, some predominant inclination, some natural propensity, which, we may presume, leads to what the apostle meant by the sin that so easily besets us.

In this discourse, I shall, 1st, Point out the principal causes of our bias or propensity to some particular vice; and, 2^{dly}, Shall observe the obligation incumbent on us, of endeavouring to lay it aside.

1. A propensity to particular sins may be complexional,

al, derived from constitutional frame and temperament. From the first parent of mankind, an hereditary corruption has been transmitted to all his posterity : whence it is, that there is not a man that liveth and sinneth not ; and that the mind is as subject to moral disorder, as the body to disease. But this corruption, this moral disease, which infected the whole human race, does not operate with equal malignity, nor is marked with the same symptoms, in all men ; but puts on various appearances, and differs from itself in almost every individual. Whether this is to be ascribed solely to a diversity of texture in the body, or to some original dissimilitude also in the frame of the mind, is uncertain. The fact, however, is apparent, that the general imperfection or corruption common to our nature, is in some measure diversified in every individual, and discovers itself in various passions and propensions, which we seem to bring into the world with us, and are usually, on all occasions, predominant. Our natural frame may render us peculiarly liable to certain vices, in the same manner as to some disorders, more than to others. Men are born with different propensities to pleasure, avarice, ambition, resentment, malice, envy, or the like. These are the produce of our nature, the native growth of our corruption. They may, indeed, by various methods be cultivated, and acquire vigour and maturity : but the seeds of them seem to be natural to the soil, to shoot up spontaneously in the mind ; and in proportion to our neglect of them, strike a deeper root, and become still more difficult to be extirpated.

Another occasion of propensity to particular vices is, the power of custom or habit : which is commonly, and justly, reputed a second nature, a kind of new nature ingrafted upon the former ; and is often, in its influence and effects, not much inferior to it. The force and influence of custom is very visible in brute-animals, who are commonly determined by it to a certain line of action, and seldom quit the tract to which they have been long accustomed. It is the same in the human species : we in like manner feel the power of custom and habit.

Actions

Actions often repeated form habits; and habits approach near to natural propensions. Any the most indifferent action, which was at first altogether optional and voluntary, becomes gradually, by use and practice, natural and almost necessary. By frequent compliance with any vice, we suffer it to acquire an influence which we know not how to resist; and then by degrees it assumes an absolute dominion: nor is it without many repeated and determined efforts, that we can ever rescue ourselves from the bondage and regain our liberty.

To this principle of custom or habit many vices and wrong propensions owe their influence. It is to this principle, (*e. g.*) not to Nature, that we may ascribe the vice of intemperance. Nature approves moderation; delights in temperate enjoyments; is disgusted and oppressed by excess. But custom and habit lead men beyond the temperate limits marked out by nature, and conduct them by degrees into the extremes of intemperance; where, though Nature denies them valuable and permanent pleasures, they form to themselves some that are fantastic, and subsist only in imagination.—— Another sin into which men are led by mere custom, and by nothing else, is the common practice of profaning the name of God: for to this sin nature has no propensity, and offers no temptation; no sense is pleased, no inclination gratified; and our reason and judgment must always oppose and condemn it. Yet let this sin be once admitted, and it will insinuate itself and insensibly gain ground, and often prevail, even against the strongest conviction of reason, and remain unsubdued to the last. Custom itself becomes a seducement in this case: the very habit of committing the sin tempts to a repetition of it; which, like a disease long neglected, becomes in a manner incurable.

Another occasion of a bias or inclination to some particular vice may arise from our situation and condition of life. Every situation is exposed to some peculiar inconvenience; every condition of life to its own trials. Thus affluence and poverty have each their respective seducements. And the same observation might be extend-

ed to the different periods of life, and to different professions and employments, which are all exposed to peculiar temptations, and to their correspondent vices. In short, our native passions and desires, our employments and our pleasures, our youth and our age, example, fashion, and the like, have all an influence in leading us to some peculiar and predominant vice.

II. Having thus pointed out the principal causes of our bias or propensity to the sin which easily besets us, I shall next proceed to consider the obligation incumbent on us, of endeavouring to correct or lay it aside.—The greater propensity we feel in ourselves towards any culpable passion or failing, with the more care and vigilance ought we to watch, and with more vigorous exertions to guard against it: For no natural or acquired propensity will acquit us from the imputation of guilt, or be admitted as a good plea for retaining a favourite vice. Our natural constitutions are indeed dependent on the will of our Creator, and not on ourselves. Our circumstances and situations in life also may be what his providence appointed. But the consequence would be fatal, if we were from thence to draw this partial conclusion, that we may comply with the temptations which these circumstances lay before us, and yield to the seducements of our temper or situation. For whatever trials we may meet with, whatever temptations may assault us, an upright and determined mind will be armed against them, and prepared for the conflict; and we can be under no necessity of yielding, but by our own consent, and by suffering our passions to betray the succours of reason and religion.

It will be in vain, then, to apologize for our sins, by pleading, with our first parents, that we were tempted; for it is the opposing and rejecting temptations in which the spirit of religion consists. This is the trial to which our Maker has destined us; this the warfare in which he has appointed us to engage, and in which he has also enabled us to conquer. In human life are many contests between reason and the passions. The best proof of our virtue is, when in these contests reason obtains the victory,

ry, and subdues every passion that wars against the soul. To obey God in matters indifferent, where the passions form no opposition, and no temptation invites us to offend, is an easy service, and is to offer him a sacrifice which costs us nothing. The only decisive test of duty is, when, in obedience to our Maker, we abstain from those sins to which nature or habit has given us a strong propensity; when we sacrifice to him our favourite passion; when we offer the beloved of our soul upon his altar. It will be in vain, therefore, to urge, in vindication of our offences, the propensities of our natural temper, the power of custom and habit, or the difficulties peculiar to our respective situations.

Difficulties there undoubtedly are in the practice of religion; for this life was intended to be a state of trial. In the nature of a moral government of the world, there must be proper trials of obedience; and it has been supposed not improbable, that all intellectual beings whatever may have been originally created in a state of trial or probation. Agreeably to which opinion, the scripture informs us, that whilst some of the angels were the servants of God, and did his pleasure, others there were who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation. But, be this as it may, God, we are assured, will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able. It is in our power to maintain the authority of reason, to oppose the corruptions of our nature and the dominion of evil habits; to resist seducements from objects without, and temptations from passions within us. This is the proper work and business of religion: this the duty which God requires at our hands; and has therefore, undoubtedly, given us ability to perform.

One great obstacle, indeed, to the correcting or guarding against the sin that most easily besets us, is the difficulty we often find in discovering and detecting it. We see few things in this world in a clear and true light; ourselves, perhaps, least of all. For though we have a power which no creatures in the world but ourselves possess, a power of turning our attention inward, and observing the various inclinations and propensities of the

soul ; yet so inattentive are we, so seldom or so slightly do we observe what passes within us, that we are in a great measure unknown to ourselves, unacquainted with our own heart.

Such likewise is the prepossession in our own favour, so flattering the glass that self-love holds before us, that this also prevents us from seeing our deformities, and marking the true features and complexion of the mind. Quick-sighted as we all are to the faults or foibles of others, we do not, or will not, with the same facility discern our own. Our passions are our apologists; they plead for our vices, and mislead our judgment. The covetous man, *e. g.* condemns dissipation, voluptuousness, pride, and every other vice, but his own avarice, which to him appears in the light of a just and laudable œconomy and prudence. The voluptuary holds in equal detestation and contempt the penurious maxims and manners of the miser ; but partiality to his own pleasures throws a veil over their guilt. The proud man may equally discern and censure the defects of both these characters; but his own pride, however faulty, he considers only as a proper and becoming dignity, which he assumes from consciousness of superior rank or merit. And thus men, under the influence of their respective ruling passions, censure and condemn the vices of others; but are insensible, or partial, to their own.

This may be a monition to us, to scrutinise with the strictest caution our own heart, to look well if there be any culpable inclination or passion lurking in it, that we may not be deceived by any flattering reports of our character made by self-partiality. To assist us in forming a right judgment of our conduct, and seeing it in a true light, the best method perhaps would be, to put ourselves as much as may be out of the question ; to divest ourselves of all concern in it ; and to suppose, that we are passing judgment, not on ourselves, but on another person. In deciding upon the actions of others, we can exclude our passions ; we can view their conduct with indifference, and examine it with impartiality ; we can consult reason, and pronounce an equal, uninfluenced sentence.

sentence. But in our own cause, our passions and inclinations are all admitted to plead in our behalf; and our understanding is in a great measure under their influence, and hardly at liberty to censure what they approve. Such is often the partiality in our own favour, that we see not the deformity of our own most offensive vices, whilst we can clearly discern, and severely censure, the least exceptionable foible in another. As self-love, then, is always partial, and shews us to ourselves in a glass which gives not a true but a flattering likeness, it might be prudent to transfer our actions to another, and to observe how they look, and whether they are becoming in that other person in whose favour we have no prepossession. Let us suppose him in the same situation with ourselves, doing what we find ourselves inclined to do, and consider what opinion we should form of his behaviour; and then bring it home, and apply it to ourselves. By this means we may perhaps prevent that corrupt influence which partiality and passion are apt to acquire over our reason and understanding; we may guard against self-deception; may obtain a just knowledge of ourselves, and be enabled to lay aside the sin, whether natural and constitutional, or acquired and habitual, that most easily, and perhaps almost imperceptibly, besets us.

S E R M O N. IX.

On FAITH.

HEB. x. 38.

Now the just shall live by faith.

THE first instructions in Christian knowledge inform us of the importance and necessity of faith to our eternal happiness. We are assured that the just shall live by faith; and that without it, it is impossible to please God. The word *faith* in the sacred writings has different acceptations; and no doctrine of the scriptures has been more misapprehended, and more obscured by various misrepresentations, than the nature of faith. Without animadverting upon the various errors concerning it, I shall consider it as implying a persuasion of the truth of our religion, of its doctrines, its promises, and declarations; and shall, in this discourse, observe the reason why faith is, in this sense, indispensably required, and declared to be the necessary condition of salvation.

1st, It seems absolutely essential to the nature, and necessary to the design and success of a divine revelation, that the messenger of it should, upon producing sufficient evidence and proper attestations from Heaven, insist upon an acknowledgement of its truth, as proceeding from that Being who cannot deceive his creatures, whose admonitions would not be offered but for our advantage, and whose authority cannot be disobeyed without danger.

On the other hand, there would be a manifest impropriety and inconsistency in offering such a revelation to the world, and at the same time declaring, that the reception of it was a matter of indifference; that it might
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with safety be either admitted or rejected ; that the one would entitle to no favour, nor the other expose us to displeasure. A revelation introduced and proposed with these circumstances would hardly invite an examination or inquiry into its credentials ; since, by the confession of the person who offered it, it might with safety be rejected ; and consequently could not be of importance to the happiness of mankind, and therefore unlikely to be the subject of a divine interposition.

But, *2dly*, the principal reason why faith is so indispensably required, and declared to be the condition of salvation, is, because it is the surest principle of holiness, the basis of obedience, the natural foundation of universal virtue. The faith so strictly required, and so highly applauded, in scripture, is not a mere acknowledgment or assent, but a vital, active principle of obedience. Faith is as much recommended and approved in scripture, as sin is reprobated and condemned : to the one is annexed the promise of eternal rewards ; the other is prohibited by the severest denunciations. From whence it may appear, that faith is, in the scriptural idea of it, utterly irreconcilable and inconsistent with sin : for, otherwise, what must be the fate of those who believe right, and live wrong ; and would consequently, be entitled to the rewards of faith, and yet incur the condemnation and penalty denounced to disobedience ?

The faith, therefore, required in scripture, must be such as includes obedience of heart and life to the precepts of the gospel, as well as the assent of the mind or understanding to the truths it delivers. And certain it is, that if the doctrines delivered in the gospel be regarded and considered with due attention, they must be productive of obedience to its precepts, and make us in every respect what we ought to be.

If, for instance, we believe in our hearts, and are persuaded of the existence of a God, supremely powerful, wise, and good, possessed of every conceivable and possible perfection, we cannot but reverence and adore a nature so infinitely superior ; and every sentiment of
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our heart must pay homage to him. If we apprehend him to be the original of good, the fountain of mercy; the author of our being, and of all the blessings that attend it: the creator and preserver of the world, and of all its inhabitants; we shall be naturally led to acknowledge his goodness in all the expressions of worship, praise, submission, and obedience. If we believe that he sent his Son into the world, by his doctrine to instruct, by his example to go before us in the paths of obedience, and by the merit of his death and sufferings to purchase, on certain conditions, the pardon of our sins, and an eternity of happiness; we must, consequently, think ourselves obliged to obey the precepts of his doctrine, to imitate the example of his life, to comply with the conditions required, and be grateful for so amazing an expression of mercy. If we firmly believe, that our blessed LORD has brought life and immortality to light; that, this life ended, we shall enter into another more important state of being, wherein endless punishments await the wicked, and where mansions of eternal bliss are prepared for the righteous; a regard to our future happiness will concur with a sense of duty, and co-operate in inviting and compelling us to the observance of religion.

For nothing can more influence the mind, nothing can take faster hold of our nature, or offer more effectual compulsion to a free and moral agent, than the hopes of immortal happiness, and the fear of never ceasing misery. If we were to suppose the veil drawn aside that intercepts the prospect of a future state; if with eyes of flesh we could look up to the throne of God, and see heaven opened, and all its glories revealed to view; it would doubtless be utterly impossible for any pleasures or interests of the world, or for all the concerns of time, to seduce us from the pursuit of such glory. Our whole attention would be fixed on heaven; that great important interest would fill our mind; and our whole care would be, so to pass through things temporal, as finally to lose not the things eternal. Faith, in some measure, draws aside this veil, and brings futu-
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city to view; sets before us the joys to be inherited by the virtuous; and must, in the same manner as the real vision, though with inferior energy, animate us to the pursuit of virtue and immortality; teach us to despise the corruptions, and reject the allurements, of the world; and to attend to the care of our everlasting interest, and to a wise provision for eternity.

In like manner, all the doctrines of the gospel are delivered with a view to secure obedience to its laws and precepts; as these also are framed to carry on and accomplish the great end and purpose of the Creator in communicating existence,—which is the felicity of his creatures. Faith is therefore recommended in Scripture, because it leads us on to virtue and happiness, and lends its friendly aid in conducting us to the highest perfection of our nature. It derives its value from its utility, and is to be cultivated for the fruits it produces. When the Scriptures assure us, that we are saved by faith, that we are sanctified by it, and that all who believe are justified from all things; the reason of these and other similar expressions is, that faith is the natural ground of obedience. It saves us not by any peculiar merit in itself; but by being the best principle of virtue, and of that holiness without which no man shall see God; and may therefore with propriety be said to be entitled to the reward of that obedience which is derived from it. Faith is not required of us for its own sake, but in order to some further end; which if not attained, the mere belief or acknowledgment of the principles of religion will not avail,—will be neither acceptable to God, nor beneficial to ourselves.

The Almighty would not have discovered himself to us, nor have required the belief of his being, his providence, or his revelation, merely that we might know there is a God, who made and governs the world, and has revealed his will to his creatures; but that this belief might have its proper effect, and be productive

of obedience to his laws. Faith, considered abstractedly from the fruits of holiness, and goodness, and charity, will not recommend us to the favour of God. The excellence of faith consists in its being the principle of a good life, and furnishing the best motives and incitements thereto, viz. the promises and denunciations of the gospel. It is a tree valuable for bringing forth good fruit; but when it fails of so doing, is of no value at all.

We are indeed assured, that whosoever believeth in Christ shall receive remission of sins; but this expression does not imply that remission of sins shall be granted to whoever professes a belief in Christ; but to him only who has such a serious and effectual conviction of the truth of his doctrine, as to make it the rule of his life and manners. It is integrity and rectitude of life, it is holiness alone, which can recommend us to the divine favour and acceptance; but as faith is previously necessary to holiness, it is consequently necessary in order to obtain the divine favour. Without faith it is impossible to please God; because the practice of religion cannot subsist without a belief of its principles: we cannot worship God unless we believe that he exists; nor can we obey his will, unless we are persuaded that he has made his will known. *He that cometh to God*, says the apostle (i. e. he who would lead a good life), *must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Without faith in these fundamental truths, without a subscription to this creed at least, virtuous manners, or a moral conduct, can have no sufficient foundation. For though some good actions may be performed from natural temper, from the common propensities of humanity, without any regard to principle; yet the only sure ground-work of good morals is the belief of a Divine Being, and of a future retribution. He who acts from this principle, acts from a motive which nothing can counterbalance; and may therefore hold fast his integrity, and persevere invariably in the paths of virtue in opposition to all seducements.

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He who is not actuated by this faith, may indeed occasionally exert some virtues, from complexional benevolence, natural disposition, or interested considerations: but can have no fixed and determined principle of goodness; no motive to perform unprofitable and disagreeable duties, or to relinquish agreeable or profitable vices; at least in private, and when the eye of the world is not upon him. Unembarrassed, as he thinks, by the obligations and restraints of religion, he has no inducement to regard any rules of virtue, right, or justice, farther than they are conducive to his present pleasure, convenience, or security. Worldly power, pleasure, profit or reputation, can be his only aim, whose views and hopes terminate in this world, and who does not believe or expect that he will be accountable in another.

I shall now proceed to offer some observations suggested by the preceding doctrine.

1st, If faith be the ground and foundation of holiness, we may hence learn the reason of the general prevalence of vice and iniquity in the world; which is, a want of faith, or want of attention to the objects of it. The iniquitous and unjust may surely be presumed not to believe, or not well to consider, that their sins will bring down upon them the severest inflictions in another world. They must adopt some errors, some fatal delusions, in order to impose upon their understanding, and vindicate their conduct to themselves. They must say in their heart, *There is no God*; or that no future account will be given to him of their actions; or that the Scriptures are not his revelation; or that his justice is not so severe as it is represented; or that he does not behold iniquity; or will at last pardon it, and not execute the inflictions he has denounced. By these, or other similar illusions, sin must come recommended, before it can possibly become the object of deliberate choice.

2^{dly}, If faith be subservient to holiness, and derives its value from its efficacy and influence on our manners, we may hence learn to estimate the intrinsic

value of every doctrine, and to weigh the degrees of malignity and danger in particular errors. Doctrines are valuable, in proportion to their moral importance, or subservience to virtue; in proportion to their influence in inclining us to preserve in our minds a constant sense of our dependence on our Maker, and of the duties we owe him, and of our obligations to observe integrity, and justice, and equity, and charity, in all our dealings. Erroneous opinions, so far as they are merely speculative, and have no tendency to corrupt morals, or to encourage or seduce to vice, seem liable only to the charge of weakness. But in what degree soever they are injurious to virtue, and have an immoral tendency, they are in the same degree pernicious to men, and offensive in the eye of Heaven.

Lastly, If the end and design, the original view and intention, of faith, was to lead us to the practice of all righteousness and goodness; let us not rest our hopes of salvation on a bare acknowledgment or belief of the gospel, in an ineffectual barren faith, productive of no virtue; but let our faith have its proper influence; let our manners correspond with our principles; and let us live as we believe. *For what doth it profit*, says the apostle, *though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works? Can faith save him?* Such faith is dead, ineffectual to all the purposes of salvation; for faith can no otherwise save us, than by its influence on our manners. Integrity of life is the genuine fruit of a right faith, as a depravity of morals may be expected to be the natural consequence of infidelity. We have good grounds to think we possess a saving faith, when our obedience is not defective; and that we are true believers of the gospel, when we live up to its rules.

On the other hand, whatever creed we profess, whatever church we adhere to, or with whatever appearance of zeal we may deceive the world, or ourselves; yet, if we live in a violation or neglect of the precepts and duties of religion, our faith is vain; whilst we believe, we must tremble; the
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faith which should save us, will be our condemnation.
—That we may all possess such an influential and effectual faith, as will produce obedience, and insure the salvation of our souls, may God of his infinite mercy grant!

SERMON

S E R M O N X.

Insufficiency of this World to our Happiness, and the consequent Probability of a Future STATE.

COLOSS. iii. 2.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

TOO great an attachment to the world and its enjoyments is the source of numberless disorders in human life, and leads us often astray from the paths of wisdom and happiness: the scripture, therefore, often exhorts us to rectify our opinion of the world, to call off our affections from its pleasures, and to direct them to objects of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal. To this end, I shall consider, *1st*, How little reason we have to place our affections solely or principally on this world and its enjoyments; and *2^{dly}*, Shall observe, that from the deficiency and imperfection of all worldly enjoyments we may infer our future happier existence in another state.

I. The wisest of men, who tried every project, pursued every plan of pleasure, that desire could suggest, and was possessed of every advantage that might be supposed to favour his pursuit, finished his course of experiments with this conclusion, that *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*. And indeed a wisdom and experience much inferior to that of Solomon might suffice to show, that earthly pleasures are defective, are not commensurate to the desires and capacity of the soul; and that true happiness is not here to be found. On the contrary, the scripture asserts, that

that *man is born to trouble*; and nature and experience but too well confirm the assertion.

But as it is always with reluctance we admit unwelcome truths, we are always willing to form, therefore, a favourable idea of human life; and in the visions of hope and fancy, we form plans of happiness which we can never execute. Though deceived by past pleasures, we give credit to the future, and live in perpetual expectation of what we never obtain. Urged by an extinguishable thirst of happiness, never fully gratified with what we have, we are always looking forward to something we have not; something that imagination presents to us at a distance, and tells us will effect the completion of our wishes. Thither then we direct our steps. But when, by much toil and labour, perhaps, we have made some progress, and have overcome various obstacles, and almost reached the object of our hopes, some accident always interposes, somewhat always steps in, and stands in the way between us and happiness, and prevents either the attainment of what we had in view, or the enjoyment we expected in it.

Such is the lot of human life, either to be debarred from our wishes; or, if we are permitted to succeed in them, to find, by a comfortless experiment, how little our success contributes to our happiness; to find, that what we have been pursuing, borrowed its chief value from the mistakes of imagination; that our passions had over-rated it; that the pleasure of the acquisition gradually diminishes, and wears off with the novelty of it; and that no sooner have we obtained one wish, than we begin to form another. If one desire is gratified, another succeeds; something unattained still engages us in a fresh pursuit; and we run an endless race for a prize we never win. Thus mankind go on seeking what they cannot find, or finding what they sought to be but illusion when they approach it. We vary our plan, and wander from project to project; but meet the same dissatisfaction, and are at last, perhaps, farther from happiness than at our first setting out.

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Such is our nature, and the nature of all worldly enjoyments, that we can neither cease to pursue, nor ever find the felicity we expected in them. Providence, doubtless for wise ends, has thought fit to intermix human life with good and evil; to tincture all its pleasures with a degree of bitterness: the purest are not unmixed; the best may satiate, but cannot satisfy.

But should we admit that the pleasures of the world have (what they are far from having) all that we fancy to be in them; were they valuable as imagination is apt to represent, and our passions to believe them; yet he who enjoys the greatest happiness, wants one happiness more,—a security for the future of what he possesses at present. For such is the precarious tenure of all earthly possessions or pleasures, that we can scarcely call them our own. Stability is not the property of any thing here below, in this region of accidents and uncertainty. Many of us may by experience know, that almost every fleeting year carries away with it some portion of our pleasure, some enjoyment, some friend perhaps, some object of delight, somewhat which we have been accustomed to consider as constituting a part of our happiness. Our pleasures, like ourselves, are all transitory and mortal; and short as life is, yet we often survive them all.

But were the enjoyments of the world in their nature stable and permanent, is there not yet an irreversible decree which must make them cease to us? If they do not make themselves wings and flee from us, must not we by necessity of nature forsake them?—we who are hourly hastening to a dissolution; when the world and all its enjoyments, with regard to us, come to an end! Life itself is as uncertain as any of its pleasures. We are frail and mortal, as well as all things about us mutable and perishing. When we have with much labour, perhaps, and long perseverance, collected the materials of enjoyment, and formed a plan, and laid a foundation, and built, as we think, a durable structure, the last enemy comes, and by him the best-built fabric of human happiness is laid in the dust.

If,

If, then, the enjoyments of the world are thus defective ; if the pursuit is anxious, the possession unsatisfying, the tenure precarious ; where is the wisdom of setting so high a price upon them ? Why do we lay out all our time and care upon shadows and illusions ? Why set our whole affections upon enjoyments that are often sought in vain, are vain when found, that can neither satisfy us while we live, nor save us from the hand of death, and must soon either forsake or be forsaken by us ?

Which leads me to observe,

II. That from the defects and imperfection of all earthly enjoyments, we may infer our future happier existence in another state.

The happiness of mankind, we have the greatest reason to believe, was the original design of the Creator in giving them existence. We can conceive no other purpose worthy of him in his plan of creation. If this purpose does not now take effect, may we not be assured that it will be accomplished hereafter ? If our heavenly Father does not bestow on us his children our portion of felicity in this world, may we not infer that he reserves this inheritance for another state ? May we not hope, that if we are not prodigal children ; if we are not undutiful to so kind a Parent ; if we make it our care to serve him, and not at any time to transgress his commandments ;—may we not hope that we shall be ever with him ; and that all that he has, all the happiness he can bestow, will one day be ours ?

Imperfect, and far inadequate to the capacity and desires of the soul, are all the enjoyments of this world. To man alone, of all creatures upon earth, is denied a happiness commensurate to the full extent of his powers. Nature seems to have made ample provision for her other children, and bestowed on them all the enjoyment their appetites crave. Man alone, though ever in pursuit, is never in possession of happiness. Impatient amidst all he can acquire, he is ever (in imagination at least) making excursions in search of some higher felicity, higher indeed than either Nature or Providence will here permit him to possess. Why, then, was man so formed as ne-

ver to acquiesce in his portion here below ? why created with capacities so extensive, for enjoyments so limited ? or for what end were implanted in him desires greater than the world can satisfy ? Not, surely, to mock his expectations, and disquiet him in vain ; not merely to make a superfluous addition to other troubles to which he is born. These desires and capacities the Divine Wisdom has doubtless suited to our condition, and planted in the mind for some wise and good end : and they seem meant to point out an hereafter ; to indicate the immortality of our being ; to intimate that this world was not designed to be the scene of our felicity ; that God hath better things in reserve for us ; that we should look, therefore, beyond the world, to another state, where those desires will not be in vain ; where he will fill up the measure of our capacities, and Himself, who is boundless as our desires, will be the object we so much long for.

Such should seem to be the divine intentions intimated in the frame of our nature. Were this world indeed the last, as well as first, scene of our existence ; were man created for no better purpose than to employ for a few years his skill and care in the support of a frail body, which no care or skill can save from corruption ; to engage in the vain pursuit of happiness, which he can neither cease to desire, nor has power to attain ; and were he then to return, and mix for ever with the dust from which he was formed ;—were these the purposes, this the end of his being, might we not complain of Nature's unkindness ? Might we not expostulate with our Creator in the language of the Psalmist, *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ?* Had the Almighty no farther view in our creation than a short subsistence on this world ; were the enjoyments of this life, such as they are, all we must be permitted to taste ; and were all our hopes and prospects to terminate in the grave ;—it would be hard to reconcile this procedure with infinite wisdom and beneficence ; hard to say to what end we live here, were we not to live hereafter. Unhappy indeed would be the lot of human nature, if after our voyage in this turbu-

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lent ocean of life, after a perhaps tempestuous passage, we were never to make the land of everlasting rest, never to arrive at the haven where we would be; but were destined to perish in the deep, and ourselves, and all our hopes, to be wrecked, and lost for ever! Too, too wretched a fate this, to be the appointment of our all-gracious Creator. The Wisest and Best of Beings, we may be assured, would never have sent us into the world, only to be born to dangers and troubles we cannot avoid, and to the desires and hopes of a felicity we were never to attain; but most certainly designed this world to be introductory to a better, where those desires will find correspondent objects, and where happiness adapted to the impressions he has given to our souls will be found.

Were our present life a state of pure unmixed enjoyment, tinged with no sorrows, unembittered with anxieties or fears, we might be tempted to suspect that this life is our all; that we have nothing beyond it to expect; and that the purposes of God with regard to mankind extend no farther. But the insufficiency, the emptiness and vanity, of all earthly enjoyments, lead us to another conclusion, and bid us apprehend some other more important purposes of his wisdom. Whatever darkness there may be in the ways of Providence; though no human understanding can penetrate the counsels of the Supreme Being; though it should be deemed presumption to say what was the precise view, the chief and ultimate object, of Divine Wisdom in his plan of creation; yet of this we may be assured, (if assurance may in any thing be obtained), that the infinitely wise and good Author of nature would never have given us being with any view that was not consistent with a regard to our happiness; and consequently, would never have sent us into the world, only to be amused and flattered with visionary hopes and expectations, and to suffer much by an inevitable succession of pains and sorrows; and must therefore have had in view another, better, happier state of being when he placed us in this.

If he had designed us for this life only, why is it not to the virtuous and good, as happy, and perfect, as abso-

lute Goodness might have made it? or why did he plant in the mind such hopes, capacities, and desires, as the world cannot, and nothing less than immortality can, satisfy? But if this world has a relation to another, and was meant to be introductory to it, it might be agreeable to the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness to give us those intimations or notices of our future existence. All the hopes and intimations of a future existence that Nature and Reason suggest; Revelation happily confirms and establishes; and assures us, that we are now only in the infancy of our being; that we shall live eternal ages: bids us therefore extend our views beyond the world, and look forward to a felicity superior to what it can furnish; a felicity equal to our largest desires, inestimable in value, and endless in duration.

Let it then be our first and principal concern, to live up to the prospects we have in view; to live in this our present state, as we shall hereafter wish to have lived: not so attentive to the objects of time, as to overlook those of eternity; not pursuing every illusion, every fugitive phantom or appearance of happiness, and forgetting that which we confess to be supreme. Pass but a few years, and the world to us will be no more; the scene will be changed, the curtain will drop between us and things on earth; and then the conviction must come, (may it not come too late!) that the interests, honours, pleasures, and possessions, of the world, were unworthy of the place they held in our esteem; and that a wise provision for another more important state of being, to which we gave perhaps little attention, was infinitely consequential to us.

Be religion then our chief object; eternity our first and great concern: let temporal cares be only of inferior consideration. Let our affection to the world be subordinate to the love of God; let his favour be the ultimate aim and end of all our pursuits; and let a principle of obedience to him give laws to our whole conduct and behaviour:—So we may hope, that his hand will mercifully guide and conduct us through the present short, illusive, scene of fleeting images of pleasure, to the great and

and lasting realities of a future and more perfect state; where we shall possess the largest measure of felicity that our improved capacities can admit, and shall dwell amidst fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

Marks of being sincerely RELIGIOUS.

JOSHUA XXIV. 14.

Fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth.

SINCERITY is the disposition of soul which alone can recommend us to GOD, and incline him to look with an eye of mercy upon the errors and frailties of our conduct. For though GOD does not demand perfection from imperfect creatures; though he expects neither infallibility in our moral determinations, nor impeccability in our conduct; yet he requires the faithful services of a heart conscious only of holy resolutions and pure intentions: he commands us to *serve him in sincerity and in truth.*

As this disposition, therefore, is essential to our well-being; as without it the certain consequence will be, an exclusion from the divine favour, and from the hopes of future felicity; I shall in this discourse observe, by what marks or tests we may discover whether we are possessed of a sincere piety; that we may enjoy its consolations if we have it, or endeavour to acquire it if we have it not.

I. If we would know whether we serve GOD in sincerity, let us look with an attentive eye into our hearts, in order to trace the true springs or principles of our actions. If, upon such inspection, we find that our conduct is founded upon sentiments of duty; that the virtues which appear in us are not appearances only, but proceed from the heart; from a regard to the authority of our Maker; from a grateful sense of his goodness and of our obligations; from a reverential fear of incurring his displeasure; from a delight and complacency in virtue, or from the hopes of obtaining those eternal rewards

wards which are promised to it; if we act from a sincere design of advancing the honour of God, or the welfare of our neighbour; of cultivating harmony and peace, aiding the cause of piety and virtue, or contributing in some shape to the public happiness;—then we may judge our piety to be sincere, because our conduct is founded on religious considerations, such as God himself has offered and prescribed to our obedience.

But, on the other hand, we must not think that we “serve God in sincerity and truth,” when any worldly considerations whatever are at the bottom of our pretended piety; when our religion is ostentatious; when, by the show of justice and uprightness, we mean only to lead the world into an opinion of our integrity; when we are charitable and humane, in order to acquire the reputation of that character; when we clothe ourselves with humility, from the pride of appearing humble; when we practise liberality, munificence, or other popular virtues, merely to favour the success of some worldly project; or when we attend the public service of God, to comply with fashion, or to avoid reproach. In all such cases, let our actions be apparently ever so religious; yet, as they proceed not from a right principle, they are only the shadows or appearances of religion without its reality, the form of godliness without its power.

In a moral estimate, every action must be placed to the account of that principle from which it is derived. Interested motives and worldly views reduce and sink the worth of the best actions; and, on the other hand, a right intention gives a value to the meanest, and turns every thing we do into virtue. A cup of cold water, administered by a charitable hand, is, in the eye of Heaven, far more estimable, than the much richer offerings of those who give that they may be seen of men. These are offered to men, and will be rewarded with human applause; the former is lent unto God, who will repay with infinite interest every such debt of virtue. St. Paul supposes it possible for a man to give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet not have charity. He may, from ostentation, or other motives, relieve distresses which his heart never feels nor commiserates. We must judge, therefore,

therefore, of our sincerity by the principles upon which we act. If our conduct is founded solely upon religious principles, our piety is sincere. If the virtues that appear in us proceed from worldly considerations, such actions are at best but prudential, and may have neither good nor evil in them. If both virtuous and prudential considerations coincide, and co-operate in producing the same actions, and exciting us to the same behaviour; as, perhaps, in the best of men, the lower views of recommending themselves to the world may occasionally mingle with better motives; the test of our sincerity in such cases is defective, as it may be difficult for ourselves to determine whether duty or interest was the true principle of our actions, or whether a regard to duty would have prompted us to the same behaviour in opposition to motives of interest. Such actions, though they have the exterior form, the image and superscription, of virtue, and may pass current in the world; yet the purity of them is debased, and their intrinsic or moral value diminished in proportion to the worldly alloy with which they are adulterated.

II. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity is, when we are as careful to preserve a good conscience as to save appearances; and act with the same integrity in secret, where God is the sole spectator of our actions, as when they lie open to the view and observation of the world. If a man is truly devout, he will offer up private addresses to his Maker, as well as attend his public worship; and will, with the same strict caution, practise self-examination, meditation, vigilance, duties to be transacted remote from the eye of the world, between God and himself, as other more visible duties, to which decency, custom, or the fear of censure, may oblige him. Is he sincerely honest? He will be faithful to his obligations and promises, though there be no witness to prove them, and no law to compel the performance. If he is strictly just, he will take no secret insidious advantage of the necessity, incapacity, or inadvertence, of his neighbour; nor withhold from him his right, however lucrative the fraud, or however concealed

ceased. If he is truly humane and benevolent, he will be as ready to distribute private, unseen alms, as to give them openly to the public demands of charity. And by the same test, the genuineness of all other virtues may be tried and examined; and we may pronounce them counterfeit and spurious, if they are not the same when no eye but God can see us, as when we act upon the public stage and in the view of the world.

III. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity and in truth is, when we pay an equal regard to the whole law; and mean not, by selecting some favourite duties, to compensate for the habitual violation or neglect of others that happen not to fall in with our taste and inclination. He who confines his regard to some select virtues, and is neglectful of others which have the same claim to regard, must not think that he serves God in sincerity; for, even in those instances where he appears to obey, he may justly be suspected to act in compliance, not with the divine commands, but natural disposition; and not to serve God, but his own inclination. Religion requires us to act always from a principle of obedience to that Almighty Being to whom obedience is due; and this principle will teach us an equal indiscriminating regard to all its precepts. No more common mistake in religion, than the substituting of some part for the whole, and the expectation of compensating for the habitual neglect of some disagreeable duties, by a regular attention to others more suited to our taste. Some persons, *e. g.* there are, whose minds are of a religious cast, who are devout in the offices of public worship, strict and regular in all its ritual observances, attentive to every circumstance which regards the exterior of religion; and from observing and approving in themselves this disposition, speak peace to their soul, and trust in themselves that they are righteous, and not as other men are. At the same time they perhaps consider not how defective they possibly are in the weightier matters of the law; how inattentive to moral obligations, to benevolence, charity, meekness, fidelity, or other virtues. Others, again, of a different character, place all religion in the moral du-

ties, in a faithful observance of every social obligation; are concerned to conduct themselves by the rules of honesty, humanity, and truth; to be as friendly and useful as their stations or abilities permit, and to perform such just or kind offices as their various relations to others exact from them: yet live as without God in the world, in an avowed indifference or neglect of his worship; in a continued course of inattention to the Greatest and Best of Beings, to whom their obligations are infinite, from whom they receive every thing, and to whom they can return nothing but the obedience of a grateful heart. They consider not, that sentiments and expressions of gratitude are much more due to the Supreme author of every good gift, than to inferior benefactors; nor do they reflect, that the most useful expression of benevolence, the most beneficial charity to mankind, is, by an open, conspicuous and avowed regard and attachment to religion, to endeavour to put a stop to that general corruptness and dissoluteness of manners, that overflowing of ungodliness, that prevailing torrent of iniquity, which, if suffered to go on, must deluge the world with distresses too great for charity to relieve.

Various indeed are the examples of partial obedience; but if we would serve God in sincerity, we must pay an universal regard to his commands, and an equal attention to every duty: and though the passions may in some instances prevail against reason, and it is vain to expect a total exemption from those infirmities which render a complete unerring obedience altogether impracticable; yet we must not apostatise from any one duty, nor knowingly and avowedly continue in any single instance to counteract the Divine will.

IV. Another evidence of our serving God in sincerity is, when we resist and overcome temptations: for to serve God in these instances only where we are not tempted to disobey, is a very defective test of our integrity. The decisive proof is, when we are faithful to our duty in opposition to seducements, and reject every solicitation that offers to corrupt us. We are here placed

placed in a probationary state, where our obedience is exposed to numerous trials and temptations, numerous as are the views, inclinations, passions, and interests of mankind. From these no condition, station, or circumstance of life, is exempt. And hence arise various conflicts in the mind between reason and passion, between the affections of nature and the principles of religion. If in such contests we find, that reason and religion prevail, and that inclinations and passions are restrained, and gratified only within the bounds that religion prescribes, it is an argument of our virtue and sincerity in the service of God.

V. The last evidence I shall mention of our serving God in sincerity is, if, in cases where we are doubtful of the obligation or lawfulness of an action, we always incline to do what appears most conformable to duty, what will best answer the ends of piety, and be most conducive to the honour of religion.

It is impracticable to give particular directions in all the endless variety of circumstances incident to human life. The laws of Christianity do not, nor is it possible they should, mark out, in all possible cases, the precise bounds of vice and virtue, right and wrong; but contain only general precepts and instructions concerning them. Charity, *e.g.* is a principal duty of religion. We are required to do good, and to distribute, to give alms of such things as we have, and to be merciful after our power: but it is not easy to say when we act up to those obligations; not easy to determine the just measure of our liberality, what portion precisely of our fortune we ought to devote to charity, or how far, in many cases, our own good ought to yield and give way to another's. Equally difficult it is to discern the point where temperance ends and intemperance begins; or accurately to mark the boundaries between forgiveness and resentment, humility and pride, sobriety and luxury, or any other virtues and their opposite vices. In all such dubious situations, where the bounds of duty cannot be sufficiently ascertained, and where we cannot discern and accurately determine the line which divides

right from wrong, lawful from unlawful; it ought to be a sacred maxim with us, to give duty the preference to every other consideration, and to keep on that side of the boundary where our innocence will be most secure. No divine law has prescribed how often we ought to offer up public devotions to God. Should we, then, be doubtful whether we are strictly obliged to attend the duties of public worship as often as the practice of the church allows an opportunity, and whether every neglect is criminal; yet it will admit of no doubt, that a regular attendance on public worship is much safer with regard to our future salvation, and more conformable to the genius and design of religion, than frequent omissions of that duty possibly can be. So also anger, within certain bounds, is not prohibited by the laws of religion. We are permitted to be angry, provided we sin not. To what extent, in particular cases, this passion may innocently be indulged, or when it becomes intemperate in degree or duration, may be a matter of difficult decision. Whenever, therefore, a suspicion arises, that our resentment may have exceeded its just limits, it is obvious, that it will be most prudent to curb and restrain it, and act in so guarded a manner as to be secure against transgression. And in all questionable cases whatsoever, if we serve God with sincerity, we shall make it our first care to ensure our integrity, and to avoid even doubtful and suspected, as much as avowed and apparent, guilt.

From these various tests and evidences, then, which have been mentioned, we may form a judgment of the sincerity and integrity of our heart. If we act, not merely from secular views and considerations, but from principles of religion and sentiments of duty; if we are equally religious and honest in private, where God is the sole spectator of our deportment, as when we appear upon the public stage of the world; if we endeavour to pay an equal obedience to the whole law, and mean not, by a stricter attention to some duties, to atone for the violation or neglect of others; if we find that our integrity is determined, and proof against seducements,

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ments, and that in doubtful cases we always take the part which will best secure a good conscience, and guard against every approach even to suspected guilt; —we may conclude, that we obey the instruction in the text, and that we *serve God in sincerity and in truth.*

SERMON

S E R M O N. XII.

Government of the PASSIONS.

PROV. iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.

THE heart in ancient philosophy, and in the language of moralists, is supposed to be the seat of the soul; and is used by the sacred and other moral writers, to denote the desires, propensions, passions and affections of our nature: And *to keep the heart*, signifies, duly to regulate and govern those passions and affections by the dictates of reason; a duty than which none can be more necessary and essential to our present peace and future felicity! "For out of the heart are the issues of life:" *i. e.* according as we guard our hearts, our lives will be well or ill conducted; and rendered, in consequence, happy or miserable. Our happiness, we may be assured, must depend upon the due regulation and conduct of our passions: for if rational beings could, like inferior creatures, find their happiness in implicitly yielding to every impulse of appetite and passion, our Creator would not have laid us under the obligation of laws and precepts, but left us to the free, unrestricted indulgence of inclination. Self government, then, or a due subjection of the passions to reason, is a duty absolutely requisite to our well-being.

In discoursing on which, I shall consider, *1st*, When our passions become culpable; *2^{dly}*, How much our happiness depends on the right government of our passions; and, *3^{dly}*, By what means this government may be attained.

I. Let

I. Let us consider when our passions become culpable. One sect there was of ancient philosophers, who condemned all emotion of mind, held every passion to be culpable, because inconsistent with that serenity of temper, that equal tranquillity of mind, which they thought should ever be preserved. They admonished their disciples, therefore, to suppress and extinguish all passions, as incompatible with wisdom, and unbecoming the character of a rational being. But this instruction was an affected and impracticable refinement, ill suited to the nature of man, who is a compound of reason and passion. Our affection to some objects, and aversion to others, are not creatures of the mind, depend not on our own choice; they are of Nature's planting; nor can we, by any act of the will, lay aside those innate dispositions, and with equal indifference meet health or sickness, pleasure or pain. As our nature is the work of an infinitely wise and good Being, we cannot suppose there are any principles or affections planted in us in vain, or that ought to be totally extirpated; nor can we think, that he would form us with passions, and then require us to be wholly dispassionate. This Stoical doctrine, therefore, seems better calculated for heaven than earth; adapted rather to the souls of men made perfect, who may be under the sole guidance and influence of reason, than to the present imperfect state of our being, as our various affections and passions are necessary spurrs and incitements to action, and without them we should sink into a languid state of indolence and inactivity.

The passions and affections which the Creator has planted in the human heart, far from being in their nature culpable, were all originally designed to have either our own personal good or the good of others for their object, and to be assisting to every virtue; though they are too generally misapplied by our corruption, and degenerate into vices. Under the direction of reason, they are conducive to the best purposes; but productive of the worst, when they throw off that subordination. For a rational indulgence as much differs from intemperance of passion, as the healthful circulation and gentle
current

current of the blood differs from the impetuous tide of a fever. Our rational and moral powers ought always to have dominion over the inferior principles of our nature. To our reason all our inclinations, desires, passions, and affections, ought to be subordinate. It ought to appoint their limits; to draw the line beyond which they should not pass; to determine when and how far they should be gratified, and where and in what measure restrained. If we reflect upon the several affections and principles of the mind, we shall perceive, that reason is by nature appointed superior to the others, and designed to superintend and govern them; so that we may say of reason, what the Psalmist says of the Author of reason, *It is set on the throne that judgeth right*. Its natural and rightful place in the mind is that of superiority to all our passions, and of absolute dominion over them.

So near and intimate, indeed, to mankind is reason, and such is its sovereign and natural authority, that a deliberate purpose to oppose its government is hardly possible. Even when most solicited and importuned by passions, seldom can we deliberately and avowedly oppose reason, without many painful struggles to evade the force of conviction, and reconcile ourselves to the guilty practice. But whenever we suffer passions to oppose or evade the authority of the higher powers of reason and conscience, they betray us into a wrong conduct; may lead to every thing that is criminal, and involve us in the deepest guilt. For passion, be it remembered, is no good apology for wrong conduct. We all stand accountable for the use of our reason; and where reason points out to us good and evil, if we choose the latter, we doubtless appear guilty in the eye of our heavenly Judge. In this case, it will be in vain to apologise by pleading passion in our defence: for the very intention of giving us reason was, to enable us to conduct and govern our passions; and the acting from the influence of any passion, in opposition to the dictates of reason, is the very iniquity that religion prohibits and condemns. To plead passion, then, in our defence, is to plead our guilt in our own vindication, is at once to acknowledge and justify our crimes.

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It is indeed no easy task for reason to maintain its sovereignty, and to reduce and keep the passions in due subjection. They are turbulent and seditious subjects, that often throw off all obedience, and mutiny and rebel against the power that has a natural and rightful dominion over them. But though we cannot wholly extirpate or subdue, yet to regulate and subject them to government is not only the duty, but the proper and most important employment, of a rational being.

II. For let it be observed, 2dly, That "out of the heart are the issues of life;" that our happiness here, as well as hereafter, is determined by the conduct of our passions. For when they are duly regulated, and act under the guidance and direction of reason, we may promise ourselves all the happiness that our station or other circumstances of life will admit: we shall reflect with pleasure on a conduct of so much propriety, so right, so decent, so becoming our nature; we shall enjoy all the exterior advantages, the security, esteem, and regard, that naturally attend a virtuous deportment; all the interior satisfaction, all the rational self-complacency, that result from the consciousness of right behaviour; and all the pleasing hopes and expectations that can be derived from a well-grounded confidence in the favour and approbation of Him who made, and will hereafter judge us. But, on the other hand, if, rejecting the counsels of reason, we resign ourselves to the conduct of any sensual, selfish, or malevolent passion; to avarice, ambition, voluptuousness, malice, envy, revenge, or the like; a train of various evils may be the unhappy consequence. Passions, when no longer under the direction of reason, are blind guides, and lead to the most fatal errors and misfortunes. If they lead to actions hurtful to society, they are punished by the resentment of society; if to vices of a personal nature, they find their punishment at home, in pains, perplexities, fears, sorrows, diseases, and death. And every culpable indulgence of passion will subject us to that tribunal which is erected in every human heart, where conscience sits as judge.

They who are at no pains to discipline and govern their passions, but, disregarding right and wrong, indiscriminately follow whithersoever inclination points the way, may find some pleasure in such pursuits; but none that can compensate for the loss of those interior satisfactions, as well as exterior advantages, that naturally result from a wise and virtuous conduct; none that can compensate for the censure of the world, for the reproaches of their own conscience, or for the painful apprehensions and terrors of a future supreme tribunal, which will one day affirm the sentence that conscience has pronounced. Well it were if the consequences of irregular passions were to be felt only in this life. The sad consideration of all is, that by their influence we may contract a heavy debt of guilt, and become liable to the justice of an offended God, whose laws we transgress, whose authority we contemn, and whose displeasure therefore we have reason to apprehend.

The government, then, of our passions, is an object highly consequential, and demands our strictest care.

III. The means by which this self-government may be attained, was the last thing proposed.

The art of conducting and governing our passions is of daily use, and of much more importance than many other pursuits to which we give our time and attention. Without this art, affluence or power, or personal or mental accomplishments, will administer little satisfaction; and, whatever our other attainments may be, we shall neither attain virtue, nor wisdom, nor happiness. The best, the most religious persons, must be conscious of frequent failings, frequent offences against this difficult law of self-government: but to the due observance of it nothing should seem more conducive than the habit of inuring the mind to consideration; the want of which is a natural occasion of vice and disorder, and gives the passions an unbounded licence. The intemperance of our passions is no otherwise to be cured or restrained, than by a resolution to restrain them: but this resolution can only be formed by considering, that a regard to interest, decency,

decency, or duty, requires us so to act : Consideration, then, or a right use of reason, is our only remedy.

Many there are, who, inattentive to the monitions of reason or conscience, take the passions for their moral instructors, and ask their inclinations what is right; who never enter into any self-expostulation, and avoid nothing so much as serious converse with themselves. While we act in this manner, hardly can even a miracle reclaim us from the error of our ways. But if, as rational beings, we would govern, rather than be governed by, our passions; it must be necessary often to retire into ourselves, and in some calm hour of reflection to review the state of the heart; and if any faulty passion appears to have got possession or admittance there, to view and consider it in that just light in which Reason, sedate and uninfluenced, will represent it; to observe its nature, its tendency; to pursue it through its train of consequences; and then a detection of its guilt, or danger may incline us to attempt an opposition to it, and may enable us to succeed in it. For passions, however strong and vigorous by nature, may be checked in their growth by timely care and prudent opposition. If we are attentive to acquire such a habit of consideration as may enable us to form just reflections on the nature and tendency of any passion, and the consequences of compliance with it, we may gradually correct and break its strength, till, however headstrong and untractable at first, it may at length tamely obey the rein, and submit to the guidance and discipline of reason.

Let us then accustom ourselves to deliberate before we act: let us form our conduct on this fixed principle, That reason, not passion, should be the guide of life: that reason is a faithful mirror, which reflects just images of things; but that every passion, like a false medium, misrepresents them: that when a storm of passion rises in us, it always obscures the light of the soul, and clouds the understanding: that its commotions deceive and mislead: that the mind agitated by passion, can no more form a true judgment of things, than a troubled

sea can reflect to the eye a distinct picture of objects: that our second calm reflections often disapprove and refute what has been suggested by our first inclinations: that we ought never, therefore, to give ear to the sudden, precipitate suggestions of any passion; but to wait till reason can offer its safer and wiser counsels, by which alone our happiness can be secured. We may approve the passions while they are temperate, while they flow with a gentle and equal current in their proper channel; but knowing how apt they are to rise with sudden impetuosity, we should always be attentive to prevent the violence of the stream from breaking down those bounds wherein it ought to be confined.

We should observe, with a watchful eye, all our passions, desires and affections; keep a constant guard on every avenue to the heart, and be careful to oppose the admittance of any wrong inclination. And though evil thoughts and desires may sometimes escape our vigilance, and intrude unexpectedly upon us; though it may not always be in our power to keep the passages to the heart so well guarded, as to prevent irregular passions from sometimes entering uninvited into the mind; yet we may always refuse to receive or entertain them: in which lies our chief security; for if we once admit, and give them a favourable reception, or comply with their first counsels, we know not where they will stop, or to what fatal and dangerous excesses they may seduce us. It highly concerns us therefore, to "keep our heart with all diligence."

And in order to succeed in this arduous, but important work, let us to our own efforts add our supplications to HIM who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; who formed the heart, and can turn as he pleases all its springs of action: and let us implore his assistance in regulating its movements, and reducing all our sentiments, inclinations, and passions, into an habitual subordination to reason; that, after having enjoyed the present advantages of a virtuous mind, of a regular state of the heart and affections, we may hereafter be deemed worthy of a place in that Kingdom

Kingdom of Reason to come, that region of moral and intellectual felicity, where the inferior principles of our nature shall never again rebel against the supreme; where the law of Sense shall no more war against the law of our Mind; and where the present contest between Reason and Passion shall terminate in everlasting harmony and peace.

S E R M O N XIII.

On AFFLICTIONS.

JOB V. 6, 7.

Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground: yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

EVERY man, by a proper use of those powers of understanding and discernment which are common to our nature, may clearly discover, not only that there is a God, who created and governs the world, but also that he is a Being supremely good and beneficent. We need not seek far for evidences of his goodness: for to it we owe ourselves, our being; nor can we justly ascribe our creation to any other principle. The Almighty did not create us by necessity or compulsion; for he is himself supreme. He did not confer on us our being without some plan or design; for his wisdom is infinite. He did not send us into the world for any advantage to be derived to himself; for, infinitely superior, his happiness cannot be dependent on us. It was, then, the redundancy of his own goodness that gave birth to creation. The happiness of his creatures was doubtless his object, when he gave them their existence; nor can we conceive any other end he can have in view in his providence and government of them.

Why then, it has been often asked, why is misery permitted to enter into the creation, to interrupt its harmony, to deface its beauty, and counteract the plan of the Creator? If *affliction cometh not forth of the dust, nor trouble spring out of the ground*, (i. e. if they are not the effects of chance and accident, or of fate and necessity), whence is it that *man is born to trouble*, which is as natural to him as

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it is for *sparks to fly upward*;—as it is for heavy bodies to fall, and the lighter to ascend? Whence all those numerous tribes of diseases, and those various species of affliction, which we may often observe in others, and often feel in ourselves? Is it possible, that a world which exhibits such a multiplicity of scenes of sorrow, can be under the care and superintendence of a Being whose attributes exclude every possibility of delighting in the miseries of his creatures? Can such numberless streams of evil be ever flowing from the Fountain of Good? How different is the face of things from what we should previously and without experience have expected to see in a world created, conducted, and superintended by infinite and unerring Goodness?

To obviate these difficulties, some of the Heathens, observing what to them appeared careless and irregular strokes of chance and fortune in the plan of nature, inferred, that these could not be the operation of a skilful and unerring hand; and that the world, therefore, was not under the care and direction of an all-powerful Superintendent: that it was beneath the majesty of HIM whose throne is in Heaven to humble himself to behold the things that are on earth; and that the inspection and superintendence of human affairs was inconsistent with that absolutely perfect tranquility from which every care was to be excluded. Other philosophers, in order to reconcile the miseries of his creatures with the goodness of the Creator, supposed that the souls of men had existed in a former state, and that all the evils and sufferings of this life were to be considered as inflictions for crimes committed in their state of pre-existence. Others, for the same purpose, framed an hypothesis of two supreme, coeternal, and coequal beings, acting in opposition to each other; the one infinitely good, and disposed to bless mankind with every felicity; the other infinitely evil, the author of all the misfortunes and miseries that afflict human life.

But for the solution of this difficulty, we must have recourse to the sacred writings, which give us a different account of the origin of those evils that afflict mankind.

kind. They inform us, that, at the creation, the divine goodness eminently displayed itself in a most glorious and delightful scene; that the new-formed world, and new-created man, were what God saw to be good, perfect in their kind, such as it became absolute and perfect goodness to create: but that man did not long continue to be what his Creator had made him; that, together with the innocence, he forfeited the felicity of paradise; and that his disobedience opened all those avenues of pain and sorrow that lead to, and terminate in, the grave. Although we see not, then, the same happy state of things as existed at the birth of the world, we are not from thence to infer, with some of the Heathens, that we are not the objects of an infinitely good Providence; but we are rather to conclude, that the happiness of paradise is not to be obtained without its innocence; that an absolute and perfect state of rest and tranquility here on earth is incompatible with our corruption; and that the degenerate state of our nature requires such correction and discipline, such an intermixture of good and of evil, as we now observe and experience in the world.

The present state of our being is to be considered only as a state of trial, or school of virtue: the soul is now only in its minority, in the infancy of its existence; in order, by proper discipline, to be educated and trained up to piety and virtue, and fitted for an admission into the heavenly paradise. Sovereign Goodness still holds the sceptre, and rules the world: but justice and wisdom are its ministers; and under their administration, both hopes and fears, corrections, and favours, rewards and punishments, are equally employed, and alike intended to promote our happiness. Afflictions, we are assured, far from being indications of God's neglecting and disregarding his creatures, are expressions of his paternal care and affection. The inflictions of Heaven are never sent, but with a merciful intention; and certain it is, that all unnecessary sufferings, sufferings that have no salutary tendency, no relation or subserviency to happiness present or future, can find no place under

der the government of an infinitely perfect and good Being.

In the further prosecution of this subject, I shall offer some considerations to explain the goodness of the Deity in the afflictions of his creatures, by pointing out some general moral or religious advantages that may result from them.

I. Although the object of the Deity, in his creation, providence, and government of mankind, is doubtless their happiness; yet as it is not consistent with his moral perfections to confer happiness indiscriminately on all, but only on the upright, the virtuous, and obedient, his goodness admits of an easy vindication in the sufferings he inflicts; because they have a natural tendency to form us to virtue, by disposing the mind to consideration; which is indeed all that in most of us is requisite to render us wiser and better. Consideration, by inclining us to attend to the silent instructions of reason and true wisdom, seldom fails to impress the mind with ideas of religion and duty. It is not so much from infidelity, as inadvertence, not from want of conviction, but want of consideration, that the sinner proceeds in iniquity. It is not because the principles of religion appear doubtful; it is because they appear not at all, because he allows himself not leisure to deliberate, and reflect upon his duties and obligations. Sin cannot stand the test of consideration. *I thought upon my ways, says the Psalmist, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments:* implying, that a reformation of life is the certain and immediate consequence of considering our ways.

Sufferings, then, by inclining the mind to be serious and considerate, have a natural tendency to reform the disobedient and inadvertent, to confirm and improve the virtues of the good, and to secure and advance the future happiness of both.

II. Amidst the flow of prosperity and ease, we are too apt to exclude from our thoughts that All-gracious BEING from whom we receive them. But sufferings remind us of his providence, and of our dependence.

And this they do by the conviction they bring, that our strength is but weakness; that we are subject to infirmities which we cannot remove, to wants we cannot supply, and exposed to various accidents and dangers which no sagacity can foresee, and no prudence avert. Where, then, shall we seek for sanctuary in the needful time of trouble, whither fly for protection, but to the Almighty Guardian of his creatures, who is neither slow to hear, nor impotent to save, all such as call upon him faithfully? To HIM, the Dispenser of happiness, the Parent of good, Nature prompts us to address ourselves to supplicate his aid, and implore his protecting hand. We find the royal Psalmist, under afflictions, ever applying to God for help; and it is to his sufferings we are indebted for a considerable part of that treasure of devotion which he left behind him. *In the time of my trouble, says he, I sought the Lord: When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God.*

And so natural is this application to the Deity in circumstances of distress, that even the most dissolute and profligate; those who on other occasions would say, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* when distress and anguish come upon them, and there is none to help; even they feel an inward, instinctive, almost irresistible, impulse to call upon God; to make their humble appeal to the Father of Mercies; to pour out their fears, their dangers, and their troubles, to him; and to fly for protection to that Power who alone can grant it. Like the prodigal in the gospel, when compelled by sufferings, and ready to perish, then it is we take the resolution to arise and go to our Father, and acknowledge our unworthiness. Trouble and affliction are indeed persuasive teachers, and effectually instruct us to look up to God, and place our dependence on him, the sole disposer of all events.

III. Sufferings have a tendency to correct in us a too partial and confined attachment to the world, and to extend and elevate our thoughts to heaven. They who meet no misfortune, and see all things smile around them,

them, and with-hold not their heart from any joy, are ready to conclude, that it is good for them to be here; are inclined to fix their affections where their treasure is; and to think no farther about futurity than only to infer, that *to-morrow shall be as this day, or much more abundant*. The wisdom of Providence, therefore, has appointed affliction and trouble to intermingle in all human affairs; has been pleased to chequer our years with prosperous and adverse vicissitudes, in order that we might be induced to transfer our affections to things above, and to elevate our hearts to those mansions where only true joy is to be found. We might perhaps have looked no farther than the pleasures of this world, content with the little portion of imperfect enjoyment they afford, were it not for pains, diseases, and misfortunes,—those instructive monitors, which are ever reminding us, that this world was not meant by our Creator to be the scene of our felicity, but that we are to expect and look for it in another state.

It may then appear, from what has been observed, that the troubles to which we are born, are perfectly consistent with the divine goodness, as they are conducive to, and promotive of, our final happiness, by yielding the fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

What obligations, then, do we owe, what habitual gratitude, what reverential affection is justly due to the Deity, under all his dispensations, whether indulgent or severe, whether he comforts or afflicts, whether he grieves or relieves us; since all his appointments, his inflictions or blessings, are equally intended to operate in our favour, and to terminate in our happiness!

It is, doubtless, in the power of the Almighty to secure us a smooth and easy passage through this vale of life; to bless us in all our ways; and, by his providential interposition, to prevent every occasion of sorrow, and to guard us from the numerous evils that lie in wait and often meet us in our pilgrimage through the world. But what his power may grant, his wisdom sees fit to withhold. His providence directs all events in the wisest

manner, and for the happiest purposes ; but we, who cannot trace the remote consequences of events, can but imperfectly judge of them, and know not with certainty what is good or evil, what is beneficial or hurtful to us. If tranquillity, pleasure, health, and success, render us negligent of religion, forgetful of God, of ourselves, the better part of ourselves, our souls, they are undoubtedly evils. If sufferings awake us to consideration and amendment, and teach us to look up to God, and be above all things solicitous to recommend ourselves to his favour, it is good for us to be thus afflicted ; and happy the days of adversity that are productive of these effects.

In our future state, when we take a retrospective view of our lives, they will appear in a light very different from that in which we see them at present. What we now consider as misfortunes and afflictions, will appear to have been mercies and blessings ; and we shall see that the intentions of the Deity were benevolent, when his inflictions seemed severe. And certain it is, that our state or condition is often then the happiest and best for us, when we are apt to judge it the worst ; that we have often the best reason to acquiesce in those appointments of Providence at which we are most inclined to grieve ; and that we ought to be most thankful, when we most complain. For we form our judgment of events from present appearances only, without being able to penetrate into their remote consequences, that lie hid in the bosom of futurity.

Let it be our determination, then, to meet every dispensation of Providence with the most submissive resignation to the will of that supremely gracious Sovereign of nature, whose unerring wisdom can alone determine what is good or evil for us ; whose unbounded goodness will direct all things finally to the happiness of his creatures ; and can infinitely overbalance the light afflictions of this world, which are but for a season, with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIV.

On the Fear of G o d.

PROV. xvi. 6.

By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.

FEAR is a passion inherent in our nature, and inseparable from it. From the influence of this principle, none, not the most intrepid, are exempt. They who, by an uncommon fortitude of mind, are superior to the apprehensions of danger, and *fear not them who can kill the body*, have yet other objects of this passion, and may fear censure, guilt, disease, dishonour;—or may have their fears for others, if not for themselves. The one universal object of fear is, or ought to be, that Almighty Being who is the arbiter of our fate, and ordereth all things both in heaven and earth. But this fear, in different persons, will differ, according to the state and disposition of the mind. The sinner, oppressed by a sense of guilt and a despondency of mercy, represents that Best of Beings as an object of terror, and dreads as an enemy the Friend and Father of mankind. But this is a species of fear which I hope none of us may ever experience, and is very different from that which is a Christian and a rational duty.

Let us then enquire, *1st*, What is that fear of God which religion recommends and requires; *2^{dly}*, What considerations are proper to excite and produce this fear; and, *lastly*, Let us observe its effects and influence on our manners.

I. The fear of God which Religion recommends and requires, is an ingenious principle, very different from that terror which results from the idea of our subjection to a being void of mercy, and possessed of power to inflict

fiſt evils which we can neither oppoſe nor avert. Such a fear of the Divine Being as leads to deſpondency, as extinguishes the conſideration of his paternal goodneſs, and blots out from the mind every liberal ſentiment of him, muſt ariſe from erroneous or partial conceptions of his nature. If we miſconceive of God, if we repreſent him under forbidden appearances, as a ſovereign ſeated always on his throne of judgment, ſevere in his laws, inflexible in his juſtice, and armed with power for the purpoſes of vengeance; if we thus admit falſe repreſentations of the Divine Majeſty; or if we form partial and defective conceptions of him, and dwell altogether upon his natural, without aſſociating with them his moral, perfections; if we conſider only his irrefiſtible power and abſolute dominion, but forget that his dominion and power are never exerted but under the direction of infinite goodneſs; or if we ſelect the more awful even of the moral perfections, ſuch as juſtice inflexible, and holineſs unſpotted, without taking into the idea the milder properties of mercy unbounded, and goodneſs univerſal; no wonder if a pious reverential awe degenerate into a ſervile and miſerable dread. If we thus view the Supreme Being through the perſpectives of ſuſpicion and terror; if we conſider him as extreme to mark what is done amiſs; as inclined to pour out the vials of his wrath as often and as ſoon as we offend; as making no favourable allowances for the infirmity of our nature; as an inexorable Judge, whom neither repentance can appeaſe, nor tears ſoften;—deſpondency and terror muſt take inevitable poſſeſſion of our minds, and *an horrible dread muſt overwhelm them.*

But ſuch a fear, derived from miſtaken and diſhonourable ideas of his nature, cannot be the duty which God requires, nor be an homage acceptable to him. This is not to fear God in the manner that Religion preſcribes: it is to fear a viſionary being ſubſtituted in his place; it is to terrify ourſelves with a phantom that nowhere exiſts, but in a diſordered imagination; for there is no ſuch real exiſtence, as a Being poſſeſſed of infinite power and dominion, that is not conducted by perfect goodneſs, unerring

erring wisdom, and unbounded mercy. Very different from this is the fear which Religion inculcates and enjoins. It is founded on just sentiments and a due esteem of the Deity, in believing him to be what he is, the righteous Governor and equitable Judge of the world ; powerful indeed, but perfectly wise, and good, and benevolent, and merciful ; who will indeed chastise and punish transgressors, but whose view in the infliction of punishment is the happiness of his creatures. A true fear of God consists in a just sense of our dependence upon him ; in the reverence naturally due to a being so great, and a character so perfect ; in a fear of offending so much goodness ; in apprehensions of forfeiting his favour ; in such an awful veneration as inspires obedience, urges us to shun every occasion of incurring his displeasure, and makes us afraid to offend, because unwilling to displease.

Religion teaches us, that God is the best and the greatest, the most amiable as well as awful of beings ; that as is his majesty, so also is his mercy ; that he is our guardian and parent, who watches over us with paternal care, supplies our wants, assists our frailty, protects our weakness, is merciful to our failings, and corrects with compassion. If the Divine Being be represented to our minds under this character, we shall neither despair of his mercy, nor dishonour his nature, by making it the object of a disingenuous and servile fear, and paying him such an illiberal extorted homage, as the victor receives from the captive, or the tyrant from his slave. God is in the scriptures most frequently described as the Father of his creatures ; and the appellation by which we are instructed to address him is, “ Our Father who is in heaven.” And agreeably to this idea, the fear which Religion recommends, resembles in kind that respectful awe, that filial reverence, with which children ought to honour a wise and good parent, but exalted and refined to its highest purity and perfection. This fear, which we all owe to the Parent of the Universe, will express itself by every reverential act of obedience and homage to him,—by an attentive and vigilant compliance with his will ;—and will deter us from offending him,

him, from apprehensions of his displeasure. But this sacred fear may, notwithstanding, admit a mixture of filial confidence, founded on that paternal benignity with which, as a father, he regardeth us his children, pouring down his blessings upon us, multiplying his mercies with a liberal and profuse hand, and gradually conducting us by the influences of his grace, in the way pointed out by unerring wisdom, to the utmost felicity our nature can admit.

The fear of GOD, therefore, that fear which religion recommends, is not a servile principle, is not a slavish, extorted dread, but a filial reverence; supposes in its Object, mercy and goodness, as well as dominion and power; and has nothing dreadful in it, but when conscious guilt arms it with unnatural terrors. It is accompanied with an humble confidence in God, and an affection to his service; and is very different from that species of fear which is the gloomy imagery of a mistaken, a melancholy, or a guilty mind. There is nothing in a true idea of God, that carries terror in it, but to the guilty; nothing but what should rather inspire hope, and confidence, and joy. A true fear of God has no tendency to enervate and oppress the mind with perpetual alarms and apprehensions; but, on the contrary, to strengthen and animate, and render it superior to all other fears. He who fears God, need fear none but him.

II. I proceed to observe what considerations are proper to excite and produce in us a just fear and reverence of God. And here we may observe, that the majesty, dignity, and various perfections of the Supreme Being, all conspire to form in his creatures a religious fear. For if superior human excellence, dignity, or goodness, commands no small degree of reverence, how much more awful ideas ought a sense of the greatness and adorable attributes of the Almighty to impress on a serious and considerate mind! His greatness is inscrutable; the most enlarged understanding cannot comprehend nor find out the Almighty to perfection. He far transcends, not only our nature, but our conceptions;

is infinitely above all that we are, and all that we can think. When we reflect, that this infinitely great and awful is also an infinitely righteous and holy Being; and that he surrounds us with his presence; that his eye, purer than to behold iniquity, penetrates the inmost recesses of the mind; that every action, and every sentiment, lies open to his inspection; and that he sees not the outward act only, but the first conception of guilt, with all its gradual progress in the heart; how religiously ought we to pursue the Psalmist's advice, and stand in awe, and sin not! Especially if to those considerations we add his omnipotent power and dominion: For our souls and bodies, our life and death, are in his hands; and he has power to save, and power to destroy. On him we are dependent for all we have, and all we are. By a word he called us into being, and by a word may remand us to our original nothing, or appoint afflictions suited to our offences. For he cannot be interrupted or opposed in the execution of his will: *He doth whatsoever pleaseth him, both in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; the pillars of heaven tremble at his reproof; the thunder of his power who can withstand?* A power so absolute, so mighty, and irresistible, cannot be contemplated without an awful reverence, even by those whose integrity and obedience might inspire the best hopes of its protection.

But it will still add to our fear and veneration of the Almighty, when we turn our eyes from his nature to our own, and observe its various frailties and imperfections, its immense distance from the highest order of created beings; for the chain of creatures ascends probably by a regular gradation from man, through various classes of superior intelligences, in the same manner as it gradually descends from man to the most imperfect of animals. When we reflect, that we are the lowest, perhaps, in the scale of intellectual beings, and sunk still lower by our degeneracy; when we consider how much our nature is stained and polluted with guilt; and that the best of men, nay, that the very heavens, are not pure in the sight of God; that he chargerh

even his angels with folly, and that those most holy and unoffending beings veil their faces before him;—how ought the contemplation of our frail nature, by infinite descents inferior to his, make all the earth to fear the LORD, and all the inhabitants of the world to stand in awe of him!—Which leads me,

III. Lastly, to observe the effects and influence of this principle of religious fear. And the natural effect of it will be, an universal attention to the divine laws. *By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* The true ground of morality and religion is, the intrinsic reasonableness, the essential and immutable rectitude, of the duties they prescribe. For moral good and evil depend not on any uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary principle; but have a fixed, permanent, immoveable foundation in nature. Gratitude and piety to God; probity, justice, fidelity, and benevolence to men; are absolutely and in their own nature right and good, worthy to be chosen, fit to be practised, antecedently to any command, and independently of all promises, rewards, or sanctions whatsoever. Reason and conscience bid us do what is right, whether any prospect of recompence be set before us or not. If the world could be supposed to subsist without the superintending providence, or even without the existence of a God, moral good and evil, virtue and vice, would still continue to be what they are; the one essentially excellent, the other unalterably blameworthy. But it must be owned, that in practice the principal support of virtue among mankind, is an awful sense of a supreme Sovereign and Judge of the world, who will finally reward what is worthy of reward, and punish what deserves punishment. To his all-perfect and unerring mind, the intrinsic, essential excellence of moral goodness is a certain, and always sufficient, motive of action. But it is too feeble an obligation to bind human beings, tempted and importuned as we are by our various passions to break loose from it. We are not perfect and spiritual enough in our present state, to be determined in all our actions, by the sole consideration of the rectitude and excellence of virtue.

tue. It is necessary that our sense of duty should be aided and invigorated by an habitual, awful impression upon our minds, of an infinitely holy, just, and powerful Sovereign of nature, who, as certainly as there is a distinction between virtue and vice, will finally approve and reward the one, and disapprove and punish the other.

This fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,—the principle that gives its first admittance to the soul. And if this principle be fixed in our minds, it will be productive of an universal caution to abstain from every action offensive to our Maker, and of an habitual concern and solicitude to conform our whole conduct to his will. We shall avoid all the artful disguises of hypocrisy, as much as open and avowed profaneness; and our conduct will be equally just and correct in our retired hours, as when we appear on the public stage of the world; knowing that no shade of retirement, no cover of hypocrisy, no veil of darkness, can hide us from that all-seeing eye, under whose inspection we live and move. This reverential fear of the Divine Being, established upon rational grounds, will be a powerful motive to every virtue, and the most effectual preservative from every sin. *How shall I do this great evil, and sin against God!* is the natural suggestion of a heart impressed with a religious fear.

Let us then habituate ourselves to form such just, awful, and elevated ideas of our Creator, as may give birth to an holy fear, tempered with a filial respect, and pious confidence in him; that we may neither dishonour his greatness by want of reverence, nor affront his goodness by a servile dread and an extorted submission. Let us remember, that if we now possess our minds with a reverential fear, and live under an habitual veneration of him, we shall be admitted hereafter into that blissful state, where perfect love will cast out all abject fear; where we shall see God as he is, not armed with terrors, but surrounded with mercy; and shall approach him with the confidence of sons, as well as the submission of creatures; where we shall offer to him an ingenu-

ous service, not proceeding from constraint or apprehensions of his vengeance, but from just sentiments of the amiableness of moral goodness, and deep impressions of holy gratitude to the Author of our felicity; where our duty will be the free-will offering of our heart; where we shall serve God with liberal affections, and no mixture of a gross and servile alloy shall debase the purity of our obedience; and where all disingenuous motives of action being done away, the purest and best of principles, the love of God and goodness, shall actuate and animate us to endless ages.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N X V .

Utility of the Light of REVELATION.

JOHN xii. 46.

I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me, should not abide in darkness.

FROM these words it appears, that one principal intention of our Saviour's coming into the world was to be a light to those who abide in darkness ; i. e. to instruct those who had only the assistances of natural reason to inform them of the principles of religion and the rules of duty. And hence I shall take occasion to consider the superior advantage of the light or instruction afforded by the Christian Revelation.

No revelation, we may be assured, would have been communicated to the world, if the assistances of natural reason had been entirely sufficient ; sufficient in such a sense as to preclude the necessity or utility of a revelation. But the insufficiency of reason, and the consequent utility of revelation, may appear from the history of all the nations of antiquity who have lived destitute of revealed instructions. How uncertain and how imperfect a progress we should have made in our inquiries into religion, upon the strength of our mere rational powers, may be collected from the errors and ignorance, the idolatries and superstitions of the Heathen world ; which afford a sad, but clear, conviction, of the weakness of untutored reason. How absurd were their conceptions of a Supreme Being ! how unworthy of his greatness ! how derogatory from the infinite excellence of his nature ! Though the character of the DEITY is strongly marked in the Creation,—and the structure of
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both heaven and earth declares the existence, wisdom, and power, of the Almighty Architect; yet such was the general corruption, that men, like the idols they worshipped, which have eyes and see not, did not in fact discern that God who was so visible in his works.

Judea was the single province, the Hebrews the only people, who made the acknowledgment of one Supreme Being a fundamental article of their religion; whereas, in all other nations, polytheism and idolatry took place, and had an establishment in their laws. Socrates, one of the best of men, was put to death by the Athenians, the most learned of the Heathens, for teaching the unity of God, and the spirituality of the worship due to him. From all the remaining monuments of Paganism, it appears, that their public worship was addressed to a multiplicity of deities: nor was there any injunction in any of their laws which required adoration to be paid to the Supreme God, and to him alone. The honour due to the Creator they transferred to his creatures; to the celestial bodies, and to brute animals; to inanimate and even imaginary beings; to passions and vices, to images and idols; to whatever folly could conceive, or fancy suggest. Any thing almost was worshipped as a divinity, except the Divine Being himself. This practice, to the dishonour of human reason, was admitted; not only in countries rude and ignorant, but in the more civilized and much admired nations of Greece and Rome. It has been observed, that in those nations idolatry seemed to gather strength and prevail, as they advanced in civilization and in learning. Though science flourished among them, yet they became still more and more addicted to the most absurd idolatries, as well as the most infamous vices; both of which had made an amazing progress at the time of our Saviour's appearance. No wonder, indeed, that polytheism and idolatry laid the foundation of the grossest and vilest corruptions. The most infamous immoralities were but the natural consequences of a religion wherein they had examples of vice in the acknowledged objects of their religious

religious worship. Where Vice was honoured with temples and altars, Virtue could expect few votaries.

Some philosophers indeed there were, who, by the strength of superior genius, saw through the folly of the general superstition. But even their light was darkness. They lamented the ignorance and blindness of the vulgar; but that sagacity which detected the errors of others, could not of itself investigate the truth. Even Athens, the seat of literature, where was the great resort of the learned, where the antient philosophy received its highest cultivation, even this school of wisdom waited for an Apostle to give her information of the unknown God. Here, if any where, in a city eminent for letters, and an age enlightened by science, the most correct and accurate ideas of God and religion that the powers of reason could frame, might be expected to be found. Here it might be supposed they would have got above the absurd idolatries and gross superstitions of the more uncivilized and ignorant nations. But we find, that in fact it was otherwise; and that St. Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given up to idolatry.

To the cure of these disorders the prescriptions of philosophy were applied in vain: for philosophers, who should have corrected the errors of the people, widely differed among themselves. Some of them scarce admitted the existence of a God; and supposed, that the world might owe its birth and formation to a fortuitous concurrence and coalition of atoms. Some admitted his being; but denied his superintendence and government of the world. Some acknowledged a general, but rejected a particular providence. Some ascribed all events to blind, undirected chance; some to absolute, unalterable fate; and others thought, that a certainty was not to be obtained in these or other opinions, and professed or pretended to universal doubt. Thus divided in the most important principles of religion, they consequently differed in the duties of it. With regard to those who denied a providence, evident it is, that submission to God, dependence upon his goodness, gratitude for his benefits,

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or resignation to his appointments, could make no part of their system of morals. And though indeed, the social and civil duties on which the peace, and order, and welfare of societies more immediately depend, were generally admitted; yet in the duties relative to the regulation and government of appetites and passions, they were far from being agreed.

If, then, men of distinguished genius, who had equal abilities and inclination to cultivate moral science, were thus bewildered, and unable to ascertain the first principles of religion; no wonder if the vulgar, the far greater part of mankind, who had neither leisure, nor inclination, nor abilities, to pursue such disquisitions, were sunk into the grossest errors and corruptions. In this benighted state of the world, before the Sun of Righteousness arose, or the rays of the Gospel shone upon mankind, they travelled on through life like wanderers in the dark, with doubtful steps, amidst danger and discomfort, without a guide to conduct them, without a prospect of the end of their journey, and with imperfect glimmerings of the way that led to it. Some light, then, some assistances, were plainly wanting, beyond what the powers of reason could supply. And at this critical season, when the nations of the world were sunk into a deplorable state of error in opinions, and corruption in morals, the Father of mercies, by a gracious interposition of his providence, favoured them with a Revelation, which not only instructed them in the Existence of one eternal and infinite Being, the author and governor of all things,—but communicated just and worthy apprehensions of his Nature and Attributes; rectified the numerous errors that were so widely dispersed, and had so long prevailed; and pointed out the paths to peace and happiness, by setting before them the precepts of God and nature, in their genuine uncorrupted purity.

If we look back and contemplate the moral world, in its first ages, before it was enlightened by the beams of Revelation, it appears like the earth in its original disordered state, when it was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. But as soon as
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the spirit of God moved, and the lights of Heaven shone upon it, regularity and order succeeded, and its night was turned into day.

But the utility of the Christian revelation will further appear, if we consider, that though we should even admit, what was not the fact, that Reason by its native, unassisted powers, might be capable of acquiring just ideas of the nature of God, his attributes and providence, and of forming an accurate and complete system of the duties we owe to him and to each other; yet it could not with certainty discover what would be the reward of duty, or what the future consequences of transgression; and could not therefore know what was necessary to be known, to give an effectual support and encouragement to virtue.

It is to be observed, that the true ground, the primary foundation, of religion and morality, is the intrinsic rectitude, propriety, and reasonableness of the duties they prescribe; which are in their own nature right and good, worthy to be regarded, fit to be practised, whether we have any prospect or promise of a future recompence or not. But yet it cannot be disowned, that such recompence is requisite for the support of virtue; and that the obligation to those duties is highly enforced by the authoritative Revelation of the divine will, and by the discoveries made in the Gospel of the nature and certainty of that final felicity which will be the future reward of obedience, without which the cause of virtue must necessarily languish. In the present state of the world, where corruption and disorder prevail, where virtue often fails to conduct its votaries to happiness, nor does vice always plunge its followers in misery; where good men often suffer, and suffer for their virtue, and wicked men prosper, and prosper even by means of iniquity;—in such a situation, the only sufficient and effectual motive to duty is the prospect of a future retribution; the expectation of a heavenly tribunal, where virtue is sure to be hap-

py in the approbation of the Judge of the whole earth, and vice to suffer the effects of his displeasure.

But as a state of future existence was looked upon in the Gentile world to be at best dark and problematical; and as an habitual regard to it, though it be the happiest principle that can possess the mind, was never recommended among them as a rule of conduct; the moral behaviour of the wisest and best of them, not founded on the firm basis of that principle, must have been unstable, and have varied with every passion and inclination. For nothing but faith in a future retribution, nothing but a firm belief that their labour will not be in vain, can keep mankind steady and immoveable in their integrity. Take away the hopes of futurity, and it will be in the power of every common calamity to shake the firmest virtue. For what power or principle would be left in the mind to induce even the good man to suffer in the cause of virtue, if he had no prospect of any other consequence than certain suffering in this world, and utter extinction hereafter?

The future existence of human nature appeared doubtful even to philosophers of the greatest name among the Heathens, who frequently expressed their want of some clearer evidence to fix in their minds a firm persuasion of it. They endeavoured, indeed, to carry their views beyond this short vale of life; they stood upon the shore, and eyed the immense ocean of eternity that lay before them; but clouds and darkness soon terminated the prospect. The light of the Gospel happily dispelled those clouds and that darkness, extricated mankind from the perplexity in which they formerly lay, and opened a view into eternity. We are not now left to dark and fruitless conjectures about immortality, without confidence in our hopes, or consolation in our fears; but have the fullest assurances of an everlasting happiness prepared for good men in a future state, and the most express declarations concerning the punishment which will be inflicted on the wicked; the expediency and importance of which, to the interests of

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of religion and virtue, must be acknowledged. These are the strongest conceivable motives to rectitude of manners, and must operate upon the mind with all the force that is compatible with the freedom of human actions. But if even these are found too weak to call men off from criminal pursuits; if even these are insufficient to procure a general attention to virtue; how vain were unassisted Reason, how ineffectual its counsels! Of what avail any speculative contemplations on the moral fitness, or excellence, or amiableness, of virtue, if the certain assurance of a happy or miserable Futurity cannot always prevail with us to turn from our evil ways!

Other doctrines there are of great importance to mankind, concerning which the Heathen world stood in great need of instruction, and which have been elucidated and ascertained by the Gospel; such as those relating to the Providence of God, — the Worship that ought to be rendered to him, — moral Duty considered in its just extent, — the terms of our Acceptance with God, and the means of reconciliation when we have offended him; which time will not permit now to be fully considered.

I shall only observe at present, that the advantage of the light communicated by the Gospel may in general appear from this consideration, That though God is no respecter of persons; though he is the equal Father of all; and the virtuous Heathen, who sincerely endeavours to please God, doubtless will please him: yet as the Christian possesses superior assistances and opportunities of moral instruction and improvement; as the most effectual dissuatives from every species of vice, and the most animating incitements to virtue and goodness, lie before him; he may in general be expected to approach nearer to moral perfection, than those who had no future prospect to operate upon their hopes and fears, to animate them to virtue, or deter them from vice. The Gospel gives us such information and lends such assistance, as must, if not wilfully rejected, give us great advantages above the Heathen world.

If, then, our heavenly Father has been pleased to favour us with distinguished regard, by dispersing the

clouds that hung over the Gentile world, and bidding the light of the Gospel shine among us, whereby the paths of virtue and happiness are pointed out with more clearness and certainty than to those who were guided by the lesser light of nature only,—how thankful ought we to be for this light? and how careful to direct our steps by it! how attentive to that wisdom which descended from above, and is transfused into the sacred pages,—which reveals to us every thing we are concerned to know, in order to be wise in our most important interest, wise unto salvation!

Let, then, the sacred writings which convey this light, —the surest guides to immortality, the words of eternal life, pure as the place from whence they were derived, wise and good as the Spirit who formed them; those holy oracles in which God announces his will to his creatures, in which our hopes are assured of everlasting felicity, and our actions directed to the attainment of it; let these employ our frequent meditations; let them be our delight, and our counsellors; and let it be our pious care, so to read, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which they have given us in our Saviour CHRIST.

S E R M O N XVI.

G O D's Judgments a Motive to H O L I N E S S.

Preached at Edinburgh, February 6,
1756, on the day appointed by public authority for a general fast, after the earthquake at Lisbon.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9. latter part.

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

AT this awful season, when the divine judgments are in the world, when *God has arisen to shake terribly the earth*, when some nations have severely felt his avenging hand, and many others have trembled under the apprehensions of it, we are justly required by the authority of our Sovereign, and loudly called upon by the voice of Religion, to humble ourselves before the Almighty RULER of the universe, to approach his throne of grace, and present our most fervent vows and supplications to him; our vows of future piety, our supplications for his protecting mercy.

The SOVEREIGN of the world has lately visited some kingdoms with the most dreadful of his inflictions, has sent notices of his judgments to the ends of the earth, and has given the inhabitants of this our island some merciful monitions to repent, lest we likewise perish. Ought we not then to attend with reverence to these awful intimations of Providence? Shall we not seriously weigh

weigh and consider these messages from heaven? Hath God uttered his voice? let the earth, and all that dwell therein, stand in awe. He hath spoken, and *called the world from the rising up of the sun unto the going down the eof.*

God speaks to mankind, not only in his revealed instructions, but in his works of creation and providence: and in these he speaks to them in a language that is universal, intelligible to all nations and ages; a language *whose sound goes out into all lands, and its words unto the ends of the world.* In this language, God has given men every where ample information of his nature and providence, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, and occasionally of his avenging justice. If he commands the sword, the famine, the pestilence, or any other messenger of his wrath, to go through a neighbouring land; what other construction can we put upon the message, than that we ought to repent, and turn unto God, lest we also fall under the same condemnation? When he commissions his destroying angel to afflict his people, the design of the commission is, to exhort them to obedience. When he visits us with his judgments, the intention of these judgments is to admonish us to render ourselves proper objects of his goodness and mercy.

In this light, the late visitations from Heaven are considered by the authority which enjoined the religious observance of this day. The same construction is put upon the divine judgments by all nations; and this construction the prophet supposes in the text to be so natural and obvious, that he lays it down as an undoubted maxim; That when God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of it will learn righteousness.

Let it not be urged, that those public calamities, which the common reason of mankind has ever taught them to consider as divine judgments, ought not to be apprehended to proceed from a particular interposition or immediate appointment of Providence; that God suffers nature to act by general laws; that things will mechanically pursue their natural course; and that all events derive their birth from the operation of second causes.

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For what are the laws of nature but the appointment of the Author of nature ; or what are second causes but instruments in the hands of the First ? Nature can in no instance act independently on her Creator ; nor can inferior causes produce any one effect without the co-operation of the Supreme, in whom they move and have their being. The same infinite, almighty Spirit, who formed the world, though to us invisible, is intimately present to every part of it ; and superintends, governs, animates, and actuates the whole. His arm, covered with the veil of natural causes, directs all events. Matter in all its movements ever obeys His impulse. Fire and hail, snow and vapours, and even wind and storm, fulfil his word. All that we are apt to ascribe to Nature, or to Fate and Necessity, or to Chance and Fortune, *i. e.* to phantoms, sounds, and names,—all, all is divine direction : the whole plan is laid, and every part of it executed, by an unseen power ; and what we call Nature, Fate, or Chance, here on earth, has another appellation among the heavenly intelligences above, where the CREATOR and his works are better understood ; and is there the Providence of the GOVERNOR of the universe, whose appointment is what we think Chance, whose will is Fate, and whose uniform manner of operation is Nature.

Though things in the material world act according to their respective natural powers, and there is an established order and constitution of things, and the good or evil, the prosperous or calamitous events which happen in the world, are generally nothing else but the course of nature, or natural causes producing their natural effects ; yet these are under the dominion of an invisible Superintendant ; who, by guiding and directing their influences, makes natural causes at all times, by the unerring skill and operation of his wisdom and power, the instruments either of his tender mercy or exemplary justice, and the means of conferring a reward or inflicting a punishment, according to mens moral deportment, or as best suits the inscrutable designs of his Providence.

That particular calamity which has lately wasted some
nations,

nations, threatened to devour others, and which we are this day assembled to implore Heaven to avert from ourselves, is in some instances in scripture represented as a judicial infliction. When the ground clave asunder under Dathan and Abiram, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto them, and all their goods, it is recorded to have been the punishment of their crimes. When the Psalmist informs us, that *the earth trembled and quaked, that the very foundations also of the hills shook and were removed*, the reason assigned is, *because God was wroth. In his anger (says Job) he removeth the mountains, and overturneth them; he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.* But we are not hence authorised to conclude, that those who seem to suffer by a particular appointment, or immediate act, of Providence, suffer for sins which cry louder for vengeance than those of the rest of mankind.

Our Saviour has forbid such uncharitable conclusions, by informing us, that those Galileans whom Pilate ordered to be slain, and whose blood he mingled with that of the sacrifices which they were offering; and likewise that those eighteen persons upon whom the tower in Siloam fell; were not sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem. God may visit a nation with his judgments, for reasons far out of our sight, far above our abilities to comprehend; for reasons known only to his own infinite and incomprehensible wisdom. *His way is in the sea, and his paths in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.* And as well may we attempt to measure those waters in the hollow of our hand, as to comprehend the counsels and designs of him whose judgments, are like the great deep.

In God's conference with Job, in order to assert and vindicate the justice of his Providence, he does not lay open the secret reasons and designs of it; but only proposes the following questions, expressed in the most beautiful language. *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measure thereof? or who hath stretched the line upon it?*

it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof? Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth as if it had issued from the womb? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days, and caused the day-spring to know his place? Where is the way where light dwelleth; and as for darkness, where is the place thereof? Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou known the treasures of the hail? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?

These and other similar questions were meant to convince Job how incapable he was of penetrating into the secret counsels of Providence, who was unable to comprehend the reasons of the best known and most familiar works of Nature. *O the depth, says St. Paul, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*

And yet, except we are informed of the mind of God, and admitted to his counsels, we can never fully comprehend the reasons of his dispensations. The designs of his Providence extend from age to age; have all a mutual connection and unseen dependence on each other; may not receive their intended completion till after a long succession of ages; may, for secret reasons, by mysterious means, be conducted to some unknown conclusion.

Impossible indeed it is for us to assign the reasons of God's dispensations, except we were able to see what was acted upon the whole theatre of nature, from the first opening of it, from the commencement of time to its latest period. We are in this world spectators only as it were of a single scene of Providence, which often appears perplexed and intricate, full of surprizing incidents and mysterious events. We must wait till the winding up of the whole, when its intricacies will be unravelled, and its mysterious passages explained; when it will appear worthy of the Divine Author; when we shall see, that the plan has been laid with in-

finite understanding, is conducted with the highest wisdom, and will be concluded with the most consummate goodness.

In the mean time, when the divine judgments are abroad in the world; when God seems to have bowed the heavens and come down, and the earth trembles at his presence; though we cannot assign a reason, why, amidst the general depravity of mankind, he has selected a particular people to be the objects of his wrath, or why he has dealt thus severely with them; yet we know one unerring interpretation of this dispensation of Providence; we know, that from the example of these terrors of the Lord, we ought to be persuaded to learn righteousness, to turn immediately unto God, to repent forthwith of our sins, and forsake them, lest we also perish by the same or some other greater calamity. St. Jude informs us, that the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was meant to be, not only a punishment for their wickedness, but a lasting example and terror to future ages.

Every divine judgment has a voice, and conveys instruction. The late judgments speak to us from heaven, and admonish us, if we have ears to hear, to fly without delay from our sins, as Lot did from those cities, when God rained fire from heaven upon them and overthrew them, lest we be consumed; to make haste to escape from them, that our souls may live; never to look back, or return to past transgressions, lest vengeance overtake us, and we become pillars or monuments of the severity of divine justice.

And we shall find still more reason to turn unto God by true repentance, and by the practice of every duty of humiliation, when we consider, that besides that dreadful calamity which has lately been the lot of some other nations, and we know not how soon may be our own, another judgment seems to be approaching, which though less dreadful in appearance, may be equally fatal in its effects, and may bring with it as sure, though not so swift, destruction. Should Heaven think fit to employ war as the minister of his wrath, does not religion,

religion, does not reason, does not the impulse of nature, direct us to take sanctuary in HIS throne, who is higher than the highest, the KING of Kings, in whose hands are the issues of war, and who can do whatsoever pleaseth him both in the armies of heaven and in those of earth? As certain as it is that there is a God and a Providence, so certain is it that human means alone cannot ensure success; and that except the LORD keep our cities, the watchmen of the state will wake in vain.

Let us not, then, exclude God from our counsels; let us not repose an absolute confidence in human policy or power,—in the wealth of our people, the situation of our island, or the floating bulwarks that defend it. Doubtful always are the events of all human affairs; but those of war are of all others the most fluctuating and uncertain, and often receive considerable revolutions from the slightest contingencies. The battle is not always to the strong. No human eye can foresee the various accidents which may defeat the best concerted measures, and blast the fairest hopes of success. Let us not, then, altogether lean on the broken reed of human strength or wisdom. Let us look up where religion instructs us for a support equal to our wants,—to HIM who governs all nature, and directs all contingencies.

To every human, let us add every religious means of defence: Let us aid and re-inforce our armies by the integrity and rectitude of our manners; let us, by the sincerest vows of holy obedience, by every pious act of humiliation, every duty that a creature can pay to its Creator, endeavour to engage Heaven on our side, who will then plead our cause with them that strive with us, whose mercy will then defend us with a shield, and whose salvation will be walls and bulwarks. The storm of war seems to be rising; and our nation, like the vessels appointed for its protection, may be now carried up to heaven, and suddenly down again to the deep; may this hour be elated with success, and the next sink into adversity. The skill and vigilance of those at the helm may in vain contend with the violence of the tem-

pest. Ought we not, then, like the disciples on the lake when their ship was covered with the waves, to address HIM whose providence never slumbers, and whom the winds and the sea obey, with their devout supplication, *Lord save us, or we perish?* If any one among us can be inattentive to this duty, and insensible of his own and the common danger, may we not say to him as the mariners did to Jonah, *What meanest thou, O sleeper! arise, and call upon thy God.*

In order to make our peace with God, and obtain his future blessings, one previous necessary step is, to be grateful for those we have received; for public as well as personal mercies; for the natural, political, and religious blessings we enjoy. In these respects, jointly considered, we are highly favoured, happy beyond the other nations of the earth; in our soil and climate, which are sufficiently bountiful; in our commerce, which spreads its sails in every sea, and furnishes the various productions which our own climate refuses. Nature has poured the ocean round us, which at once conveys to us the wealth of foreign kingdoms, and guards the possession of it.

Happy in our constitution of Government, in which, far from being the slaves of power, the sovereign and the subjects possess their respective rights, and, like the ocean which surrounds them, have their bounds prescribed, which, though they may sometimes rage and swell, they cannot pass. Happy in the enjoyment of Liberty, the greatest of public blessings; Liberty, which, refused admittance to many nations since the beginning of the world, and for many ages exiled from others where once she inhabited, has at last fixed her chief residence in this envied island, where, protecting and protected, favoured by the monarch, and venerated by the people, she dispenses her blessings to both! Happy in a religion, of whose peculiar excellence we may justly boast, clear and unpolluted, as the fountain from whence it flows; whose streams, neither discoloured with the superstition of some countries, nor tinged with the enthusiasm

enthusiasm of others, run nowhere in greater purity than in our own.

Such are the public blessings with which Heaven has favoured and distinguished us. One blessing indeed is still wanting; and that is, a heart duly sensible of them; which is itself one of the greatest blessings we can possess. Let us then be kind to ourselves, and just to our Creator, in impressing our minds with a grateful sense of these and all his mercies; so grateful a sense and so deeply impressed, as may justify us in approaching him with our requests for a continuance of them.

To our gratitude for his mercies, let us add our humblest supplications to him to avert the inflictions with which he now threatens us; not to suffer the deep to swallow us up; nor the pit to shut her mouth upon us; not to deliver us up to the will of our enemies, nor to let our foes triumph over us. Let us add an holy sorrow for our offences which may have deserved those inflictions; and let us turn unto the LORD our God, with weeping, with fasting, and with mourning. To every outward expression of humiliation; let us add the sincerest piety of soul; let us rent our hearts, and not our garments; let us supplicate his blessings, not only with our lips, but in our lives. When the united addresses of a whole nation are offered to Heaven, and the hearts of a whole people are lifted up to God in prayer, it is pious and reasonable to hope; that he will hear them from the habitation of his holiness; that he will stay his hand, though armed for destruction; and will suffer an assembly of holy supplicants, surrounding his throne, to disarm him, as it were, of his vengeance, and turn away his wrathful indignation; and that he will extend the same mercy to us as to other nations, whose destruction, the scripture informs us, he had threatened; and yet, upon their repentance, repented of the evils denounced against them, and did them not. *O that we were wise, that we would consider this! O that there were such an heart in us! that we would turn unto God and fear him, and keep his commandments always, that it might be well with us!*

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But if the cry of the national sins should reach heaven, and with a voice louder than our prayers call for vengeance; or if for reasons known only to his own unsearchable wisdom, God should appoint these nations to become examples of his avenging justice, and to suffer the inflictions he threatens; yet if, attentive to the admonitions of his judgments, we turn from our evil ways, and repent, and learn righteousness, our own personal piety will always recommend us to his protection, and ensure his favour. Then, whatever judgment he may see fit to inflict; though war rise up against us, and the sword go through the land; or though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea;—still we may hold fast our confidence in God; still we may be assured, that he will not withdraw his mercy from us.

Or, if the judgments that are now in the earth should even be appointed to be preparatory to the final, general judgment; if we could suppose, that the late convulsions of the earth were meant to unhinge its frame, and to precede its immediate dissolution; if we should live even to see that last tremendous day and hour, of which knoweth no man; when an universal earthquake shall shake the foundations of the world, and involve all its kingdoms and the glory of them, all the works of art and nature, cities and provinces, in one promiscuous ruin; when sinners shall consider as the mildest of mercies, what now appears the most dreadful of visitations; when they shall in vain implore the calamity which they this day deprecate, in vain call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the hills to cover them; even then, supported by a consciousness of duty and an holy confidence in God, we may hope, that the hand of Providence will conduct us from this seat of discord, these regions of judgment, to where peace and mercy dwell; where no evil can ever approach, where no judgment ever visits, where the voice of discord is never heard, where will be no calamities to demand our prayers, nothing but mercies to rejoice us; where everlasting praise will be our employment, and everlasting peace our reward.

S E R M O N XVII.

Our SAVIOUR'S EXAMPLE recommended to our imitation.

I PET. ii. 21.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.

OUR blessed LORD, whose example is here recommended to our imitation; came into the world, to live, as well as to die, for us; and not only by the effusion of his sacred blood to offer an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of mankind, but also to go before us as our guide and conductor in the paths of virtue, and to exhibit in his own manners a complete pattern of unerring rectitude of life. And it is a glory peculiar to the Christian institution, that the Author of it was himself the great example of those duties which he required from his followers. In his whole deportment, he exemplified his doctrine; and not only taught, but fulfilled, all righteousness. Herein he claims an unrivalled superiority above all other the most eminent prophets, philosophers, or law-givers; the sanctity of whose lives never equalled the purity of their precepts. They were indeed, many of them, exemplary in their manners, but not faultless; instructive, but not unerring, guides. His is the only faultless, finished character, that ever appeared in human form,—a complete and perfect model of universal goodness. He had all the moral virtues of our nature, without any of its sinful frailties. In him we observe no spot or blemish, no infirmity or defect to shade or obscure his other excellencies. In this SUN of Righteousness the virtues all centre, and shine with such superior

rior lustre, that all other characters, like lesser lights, lose their brightness, and disappear before it.

In this discourse I shall consider the excellence of our blessed Saviour's religious deportment, with regard to the principal duties we owe to God, to ourselves, and to mankind.

I. I shall begin with observing the example of his piety ; both because it is the first and great commandment, the supreme obligation incumbent on all moral beings ; and because it appeared with superior distinction in his whole life, and seemed to be the ruling principle of his conduct. For he not only often retired from the notice of the world, that he might indulge religious contemplation, and offer up his supplications to HIM who seeth in secret, sometimes continuing whole nights in prayer ; but was equally observant of public, as of private, devotion. Even before he assumed his ministerial character, though the sacred historians are silent as to other particulars of his conduct, yet they inform us, that it was his custom to attend the service of the synagogue on the sabbath-day.

From this example we may learn, not only the propriety of private supplications to the Throne of Grace, but the obligation also of frequently assembling and assisting at the public solemnities of worship. If it became the great Founder of our religion to put up both private and public addresses to Heaven, it is doubtless a duty incumbent also on us, as our dependence on the Author of our being is not less, and our wants and infirmities are infinitely greater. And however some may consider Piety as an unnecessary ingredient in their character, provided they are just, and honest, and friendly in their dispositions and actions ; yet certainly no truth can be more evident than the obligation of the duties of piety, both from our Saviour's example, and from the reason of the thing. For what are the duties of Piety, but expressions of reverence and gratitude to the Supreme Being ? And surely his perfections justly demand the one, and his blessings daily conferred on us give him an unquestionable right to the other. Whatever
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other virtues may enter into the brightest character, yet without Piety it will be defective in the most essential duty of a reasonable and dependent being.

But further : Most conspicuous also was our blessed LORD's Resignation to the Divine Will. He submitted to all the humiliations of mortality. His life was a scene of invincible patience under indignities and afflictions : *Never was any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger.* Though he had all the tender passions of human nature, and doubtless the quickest sensibility of pain and anguish ; yet he endured them with more than human patience. In the last and most distressful scene of his life, though he expressed in his prayer the strongest aversion to the torture and ignominy of crucifixion, yet still it was accompanied with due submission to the will of his heavenly Father : *Father, not my will, but thine be done.* He patiently submitted to the severest inflictions, and drank the bitter cup with a fortitude superior to his sufferings.

Let us hence transcribe into our practice a pious resignation to God, and an humble acquiescence under his most afflictive dispensations. If our blessed LORD, who knew no guilt, willingly endured the punishment of it ; if he submitted to suffer for our sins, not for his own ; all impatience and discontent must ill become us, when our light afflictions fall short of the weight and severity of his sufferings ; when we are conscious that we receive only the reward of our evil deeds, and that the inflictions of divine justice are much gentler than our iniquities deserve.

Our Saviour also, in his whole conduct, expressed an eminent Zeal for the Honour of God. This appeared not only in his punctual attendance on the solemnities of public worship, which have an immediate and direct tendency to advance the divine honour,—but also particularly in his expelling the buyers and sellers out of the temple ; in the indignation he expressed against those whose impiety presumed to profane a place sacred to the duties of religion.

II. If we observe our Saviour's life with regard to those duties which we owe to ourselves, we shall find them all united in him; and that, if ever virtue appeared in a corporeal form, if ever it was incarnate and visible to human eyes, it was when the SON of GOD took upon him our nature. He observed a due medium between the extremes of luxuries and austerities; thereby teaching the world, that duty demands not a total abstinence from the satisfaction of life, as was then the opinion of the Pharisees, but a prudent and temperate use of them. He honoured even feasts more than once with his presence, and added to the provisions of one of them by a miracle. In his whole deportment, religion appeared, not with a gloomy aspect, or a severe and forbidding mien; but with a graceful form, and sober majesty, and in all the beauty of holiness. We meet with much higher appearances of exterior sanctity, and more severe austerities, in the life of John the Baptist; which, as he was not vested with the power of miracles, might be necessary in order to attract observation, and engage the public attention to his doctrine: But as our blessed LORD's divine commission was abundantly proved by miraculous attestations, and as his life was to be an universal model and rule of duty to succeeding ages, he gave a more easy, natural, and generally useful example, adapted to the imitation of all ranks and orders of men.

Humility is another virtue which distinguishes itself in every part of our Saviour's life and character. What an amazing scene of humility opens to us on our first reflections on him, as descending from that inconceivable glory which he possessed before his incarnation, to a nature so much inferior to his own, and to all the abasements and infirmities of that nature, sin only excepted! He came not in the form of a temporal prince, surrounded with the pageantry of human grandeur, as the Jews expected: he came, *not to be ministered unto, but to minister*. If we attend him in his conversations, we find him preaching the gospel to the poor; and even among his followers appearing as a servant rather than a master. We find him executing the lowest office of a servant,
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in washing his disciples feet; and the instruction he inculcates on this occasion is, that if ~~HE~~ their Lord and Master had made such condescensions to them, much more ought they to be assisting in the like offices of humiliation one to another. There is, perhaps, no virtue of his, which we have so much reason, and so little inclination, to imitate. But if to him such acts of humility appeared not unbecoming the majesty of ~~HIS~~ nature, surely the greatest among the sons of men ought to think it no diminution of their dignity to be of an humble and contrite spirit; no dishonour to the brightest accomplishments, or the most elevated stations, to practise the humilities of true benevolence.

And as our blessed LORD submitted to such condescensions, to teach those of the highest rank to be humble and assisting to their inferiors; so also, to give to the lower classes a lesson of complacency and contentment, he chose a condition destitute of the common provisions of life, and exposed to the hunger and thirst, the pains and distresses, which he relieved in others. *The son of man had not where to lay his head*; nor was he able to pay the common tribute without a miracle. In this, as in all other instances, his manners corresponded with his doctrine; which instructs us, not to set our affections on the world, not to lay up for ourselves treasures in earth, but in heaven.

We may also from hence be assured, that poverty is no indication of the divine displeasure; that if the Providence of GOD should think fit to reduce us to the lowest circumstances of indigence, and the most humiliating situation, we ought not thence to infer that he has forgotten to be gracious to us, or that his regard is at all diminished,—seeing he was pleased to place in these circumstances of poverty and affliction, even his Son, in whom he was well pleased.

III. Lastly, The life of our Saviour was most exemplary in the duties which we owe one to another. His piety, which was the leading principle of his conduct, was rational, not rapturous; instructive, not ostentatious; did not express itself in peculiar austerities or affected singularities, in abstruse mysteries and intricate specu-

lations, which might deter a timorous, or discourage a weak disciple;—but in the plain and useful duties of a good life. All he did, or taught, or suffered, was one continued act of benevolence. It was his meat and drink, his care and delight, his life and happiness, to go about doing good; to seek occasions of conferring his blessings; to lay hold on every opportunity of promoting both the temporal and eternal interests of mankind. It was his manner, from common occurrences, to take occasion of introducing some doctrine salutary to the soul, and tending to its spiritual nutriment, and at the same time he went about healing all manner of sickness and diseases among the people. Mercy, with a heavenly voice, spoke in all he uttered: Charity poured forth her stores in all he did.

Even the miracles he performed, were as expressive of his goodness as of his power; and were wrought for the benefit, not the amazement, of those that saw them. They gave eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, bread to the indigent, health to the sick, and even life to the dead. Equally proofs of his humane disposition and his divine authority, they were worthy of the Son of God, and the Brother of Mankind. We are not indeed capable of expressing our benevolence in the same miraculous manner as our blessed Lord; yet his example may teach us, that we ought, as we have opportunity, to administer relief to the needy, assistance to the injured, protection to the oppressed, instruction to the ignorant, encouragement to the weak, and consolation to the afflicted. It may teach us to be merciful, not only as our Father which is in heaven, but as his Son upon earth, was merciful; and to endeavour, to the utmost of our power, to become saviours one to another.

Again, the benignant and forgiving disposition of our Lord was not less exemplary than his other virtues. In him the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit was most conspicuous. Compassion, forgiveness, and beneficence, were the returns he made to provocations, indignities, and injuries. Himself was unmoved at that behaviour
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of the Samaritans, which provoked his disciples to solicit him to call down fire from heaven to consume them. His calm, dispassionate answer to the officer who smote him, was, *If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. When exposed with mock pageantry to the derision of the people, and, through a long course of preparatory insults and indignities, led on to his crucifixion, he discovered no marks of impatience, no thirst of revenge, no tincture of ungoverned and unforgiving resentment. He still possessed the same mildness of disposition, the same equal composure of spirit, the same unconquerable benevolence. No provocations could irritate him to a desire of returning evil for evil, nor the most undeserved indignities prevail with him to depart from his rule of triumphing over the injustice and insolence of his oppressors by acts of kindness and commiseration. With a meekness as invincible as their malice, he was as ready to forgive injuries and insults, as they were to offer them. Even upon the cross, amidst the agonies of death and the reproaches of his persecutors, he employed his latest breath to serve the authors of his sufferings: he poured out his prayers as well as his blood, for those that shed it; and urged in their favour the only extenuation their crime could admit, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Frequent and serious contemplation of his example would be a powerful mean to suppress in us all malice, hatred, and revenge; and, whilst we were not insensible of the injuries we received, would instruct us not to forget tenderness and humanity to the authors of them.

The limits of this discourse will not permit me to enumerate the virtues, nor do justice to the character, of the blessed Jesus. His was a perfect and complete example of universal righteousness: an example so perfect, as to have in it no mixture of human infirmity; and so complete, as to direct our conduct in every duty.

ty. In him we see every virtue delineated; we see a faultless, finished portrait of holiness, a visible representation of the invisible perfections of the Deity. Let us then let this example often before us; let the lively image of his piety be often present to our thoughts: that we may imitate his virtues; that we may form our manners by that perfect model; and with pious industry strive to approach nearer to his nature, who for this purpose mercifully condescended to assume ours.

Let us often recollect and review the sacred history of his life; let us meditate on the various passages of it, record them in our breasts, write them upon the table of our hearts; that our souls may take the impression of his holiness, and the same mind may be in us which was in CHRIST JESUS. And though it is not possible to arrive at his immaculate perfection, or to purify ourselves as he was pure; yet we may be always approaching nearer to his unspotted purity and perfection; may be always improving our own virtues by copying his; and though we cannot equal him, we may excel ourselves. Though he no longer in his human nature dwells and converses upon earth; yet, in his example, he still teaches and exhorts to righteousness. In the scriptures he still appears: though not personally, as to the Jews; yet he there still exhibits his miracles, repeats his divine precepts, inculcates the purest virtues, instructs us by his heavenly wisdom, speaks as never man spake, and manifests himself to our Reason as plainly as he did to their Senses.

Blessed, doubtless, were they whose senses were conscious of his presence; blessed the eyes that saw, and the ears that heard him: but yet more blessed are we who have not seen, if we believe and obey his doctrine; more blessed we, if we hear the word of God, and keep it.

I shall conclude this discourse with a collect of our church.—“O LORD, who has given thine only Son
“to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an
“ensample

“ ensample of godly life, give us grace, that we may
“ always most thankfully receive that his inestimable
“ benefit, and also daily endeavour to follow
“ the blessed steps of his most holy life, through the
“ same Jesus Christ our LORD. To whom, with the
“ Father, and holy Spirit,” &c.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVIII.

Requisites of PRAYER.

JAM. iv. 3.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.

THERE is hardly any principle of religion more generally admitted, than that the CREATOR of the world ought to be worshipped by his intelligent creatures. It is the clear dictate of nature, that we should address Him, the SOVEREIGN of the universe, for the supply of our necessities and wants; that we should offer to him the sacrifice of a devout heart, and the humblest acknowledgments of our dependence on him. The universal practice of all nations, and that impulse which all men feel to apply to him in seasons of distress, clearly point out the sense of nature in this particular. Prayer is the nearest approach that, in our present state, we can make to the Deity. To neglect or shun this duty, is to shun all approaches to God; it is to withdraw, as far as may be, from his presence and protection; it is to disclaim all intercourse with him, to disown our dependence, to disavow our obligations, and give up the expectations of his favour.

Prayer, then, being both a reasonable and important duty, we ought to inquire, How we may perform it in a right manner; how we may render ourselves and our prayers acceptable to the Object of our worship; for though we ask, we shall not receive, if we ask amiss. Let us consider, therefore, with what qualifications or dispositions of mind we should approach our Maker, when we offer our addresses to him.

I. Attention

I. Attention and fervency are principally requisite to render our prayers acceptable to God, and beneficial to ourselves. If we draw near to him with our lips only, whilst our heart is far from him; if we attend the duties of his worship with a languid, absent, and inattentive mind, in compliance only with form and custom, without due impressions of the sacredness of the service in which we are engaged; can we expect that such superficial unmeaning homage can recommend us to his favour, or that he will accept the bare resemblance or mock representation of prayer?

It is not the service of the lips, it is the homage of the mind, which God regards. He sees and approves even the silent devotions of the heart, which need not be formed into vocal prayers to inform him of our necessities, but only to aid our own weakness, and to keep the mind more steady and attentive to the duty we are paying to our CREATOR. When we approach the throne of grace, and address the SOVEREIGN LORD of heaven and earth; then surely, if ever, there is the highest occasion to bring with us a serious and collected frame of mind, to awaken all our attention, to call upon all that is within us, and to summon and assemble all the powers and faculties of the soul.

Such indeed, it must be owned, is the weakness and imbecility of our nature, that the most vigilant piety cannot long keep its attention so much awake, and so steadily fixed on the duties of worship, as to prevent all casual involuntary wandering. Ideas often pass through the mind in quick succession: nor is it easy always to detain and fix what are in their nature so fugitive and volatile. But if we know ourselves subject to this weakness, it concerns us the more to guard against it: and though it may not be always in our power to prevent foreign ideas from offering themselves to the mind, and mingling with our devotions; yet we need not invite or entertain them, but may dismiss them as soon as they intrude. We ought not, therefore, always to charge that upon the infirmity of our nature, which is often the effect of voluntary in-

advertence. God, who made and fashioned us, and expects a service proportioned only to the powers he has given us, will no doubt pardon all involuntary defects that may accompany our addresses to him; but we ought to remember, that the importance of the duty claims every regard, all the attention we are able to give it.

And if we give due attention to our prayers, they will be accompanied with suitable affections. We shall pray with fervency in such degree as our natural temperament or frame of mind will admit; for all are not capable of the same fervour: nor is it required of us to feel warm transports or emotions when we address ourselves to God; for these depend on natural sensibility and complexion, or rise out of particular circumstances and occasions. For which reason, it has been the wisdom of the compilers of our liturgy, to reject all rapturous expressions, and to suit its devotional language to a grave and sedate, not to an imperuous, enthusiastick, spirit of piety.

II. Perseverance is another condition upon which depends the success of our prayers. In the parable of the unjust judge, we are informed, that he who neither feared God nor regarded man, who was insensible to all considerations of religion or humanity, was yet prevailed on to grant relief to a necessitous supplicant, merely by the continued importunity of her petitions. And our Saviour has instructed us to conclude, that perseverance in prayer to Heaven will have the same effect; for he spoke the parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

True it is, the reasons for the prevalence of importunity with men, have no place when applied to God. Men may not attend to our first applications; may not be able or inclined to assist us; may pride themselves in the dependence of their supplicants, and in the ostentation of power; and the favours they mean to refuse, importunity and perseverance may extort. But God always knows our necessities even before we ask; is infinitely able to grant all that we desire; can
receive

receive no accession of glory from the dependence of his creatures; is incapable of being softened by the repetition, or wearied by the importunity, of addresses.

For what reasons, then, it may be asked, is it necessary to persevere in our supplications to Heaven? Why should a Being infinitely wise and good, who needs not to deliberate how far it is reasonable to favour our petitions; why should he grant to our repeated, what he refuses to our first, requests?

The reasons of the divine administration are often far above out of our sight; his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; and we might therefore, and ought to acquiesce in our Saviour's declaration concerning the methods of his providence and moral government, though we are quite incapable of accounting for them. But, in the present case, it is easy to assign, if not the true, yet just grounds for such a conduct. For though perseverance in prayer can have no efficacy in inclining God to be more merciful, it may yet be effectual in disposing us to become proper objects of mercy. Though it can create no change in the divine nature, which is immutable, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; yet it may form in us a new heart and a new spirit, and render us more worthy of his favours, which, on that consideration, may be granted.

Besides, he understands our necessities much better than we ourselves; he knows the properest season for conferring his blessings, and when we are best fitted to profit by them. He is the universal Parent of his creatures, and suits the methods of his providence to our truest advantage. Where an immediate compliance with our requests is most conducive to our final happiness, he is as ready to give as we to ask. Where to refuse our petitions will contribute more to this great end, whilst he appears to deny a blessing, he grants one in the refusal; and where suspending his blessings for a time will be most beneficial, there they are put off to a more convenient season.

Though God, therefore, may, for wise reasons, delay to answer our first petitions; yet ought we not to

despair of the acceptance of our repeated prayers. We ought to pray without ceasing: *i. e.* not, with a weak superstition or enthusiastic pride, to devote our whole time to prayers; but, by frequent periodical performances of this duty, to recommend ourselves and our concernments to the care of Heaven.

III. Humility, and submission to the divine will, are necessary conditions of our prayers. When we come into the presence of the SOVEREIGN of the Universe, we ought to consider the infinite superiority of his nature to ours, and impress our hearts with the most awful veneration of him, and offer our supplications with the most humble reverence, suited to his greatness and majesty, and our own meanness and unworthiness to approach him.

And as we ought with the most reverential awe to come before the LORD, and bow ourselves before the most high God, and with the deepest humility of heart to sue for mercies we have no right to, and for blessings we deserve not; so likewise ought we to resign all our requests, inclinations, and desires, to the determination of his all-wise providence. We are improper judges of our own condition, and know not what to pray for as we ought. If we ask, what, in the opinion of the world, are reputed blessings; wealth, honour, distinction, success, and the like; these may, in their immediate or remote consequences, be attended with a train of unknown evils. Though in themselves good, we may be disposed to make an improper use of them, and to us they may become evil; or though they favour our present, they may be fatal to our future interests.

We ought to submit all our requests, therefore, to the wisdom of HIM who has all futurity before him, and best knows how to govern his world, and when and where to confer his blessings. Of this submission our SAVIOUR has left us a striking example: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* In conformity to which example, we ought to submit our wills to the will of Heaven; and

to all our prayers, intentionally at least, if not expressly, to add, *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*; or, as our church has directed us to address God, that he would fulfil the desires and petitions of his servants as may be most expedient for them.

IV. Our prayers to God ought to be accompanied with a trust and confidence in his goodness; a confidence that composes our fears, and sets us above all despondency. When, indeed, we reflect upon the infinite holiness and majesty of God, and our own impurity and meanness; when we consider the immense distance between his nature and ours, rendered still more immense, if that were possible, by our unworthiness, it might seem presumption enough to present ourselves and our addresses before the throne of God, without adding a confidence that those addresses will be regarded by him. But as those addresses are made in obedience to his commands, and our hopes encouraged by his sure promises, we may and ought to approach him with a confidence that we shall either be indulged in the particular subject of our requests, or that he will do in that and every other case that we recommend to his providence, whatever to his wisdom appears best and fittest for us.

V. The last requisite I shall mention, necessary to recommend our prayers to the divine acceptance, is integrity of heart; without which we have reason to apprehend, that God will be as regardless of our supplications, as we have been of his commandments. This we know, that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth: *If I incline unto wickedness with my heart, says the Psalmist, the Lord will not hear me.* A religious disposition of mind, is the only foundation of confidence when we address our prayers to God. The obedience of a religious life is to him the most acceptable worship; and where integrity and virtue are wanting, no homage, no sacrifice, no services, can obtain his acceptance. If we pray for pardon of our sins, we must resolve to forsake them; if we implore his blessings, it must be our care

to deserve them. We must come before him, therefore, not with all our sins and pollutions about us; but with an upright, uncorrupted heart, filled with the purest affections, with all the virtues, with every moral grace that can adorn our nature, and recommend it to his countenance.

From what has been observed, it may appear, that attention, fervency, perseverance, humility, submission to the will of God, confidence in his goodness, and integrity of heart, are the conditions requisite to render our prayers acceptable to him.

Let us then, as often as we return to this house of prayer, bring with us a mind serious, devout and disengaged; neither ruffled with cares, nor dissipated by pleasure; that we may serve God with an undivided attention, and with a heart devoted solely to the right discharge of the duty which we profess to perform. Let no inadvertent behaviour betray our absence from God, and the indisposition of our heart to pay him that homage which with our lips we acknowledge to be due to him. Let not the suspension of his blessings discourage our perseverance: for though he favours not our first, he may our repeated, petitions. Let them be accompanied with humility of heart; with an absolute, unreserved, submission to the sovereign will of HIM whose goodness to us is expressed sometimes by gratifying, sometimes by disappointing, our hopes; and with a firm dependence on his providence, and a trust that he will order all things for our good. And let them be offered up with a mind pure and uncorrupted.

To the First, the Greatest, and the Best of Beings, be it our care to pay our daily homage. We are every day dependent on God; and every day should begin, and close, with pious acknowledgments of our dependence. Every morning, we should look up to him for a renewal of his mercies; and, every evening, ask forgiveness for the errors of the preceding day. When we rise, we should implore his guidance; and when we

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lie down, we should supplicate his protection. Often should we lift up our souls in occasional supplications to the great Preserver of our being, and recommend ourselves and our concertments to his providence.

Neither private nor public devotion should be omitted; for each has its distinct and peculiar advantages. Private devotion is better fitted to ask particular blessings, or to request the forgiveness of private transgressions. In the closet-retirement, where the supplicant withdraws from the world to hold converse with his God, and is under no eye but that of Heaven, he may pour out the sighings of a contrite heart; may unburden his disconsolate bosom; may disclose those secret griefs and necessities which are not to be revealed to the eye of the world. There he may indulge all the fervour of piety, without suspicion of hypocrisy or ostentation; there also he is better able to fix his attention, which public objects, by offering themselves to our notice, are but too apt to interrupt and divert.

On the other hand, public addresses to God are better adapted to acknowledge public mercies, to bring down common blessings, and to avert public judgments. Here also the solemnity of the house of God reminds us of the reverence due to his awful presence; and the piety of our fellow-supPLICANTS may excite and animate our devotions, and invite us to an holy emulation. We cannot doubt the acceptance of both our public and retired devotions. When we are here gathered together, we have our SAVIOUR'S promise, that he will be in the midst of us; and we have the same assurance, that if we pray to our FATHER in secret, our FATHER which is in secret shall reward us openly.

Let us not then neglect to pay this homage, so respectful to God, and so beneficial to ourselves. Let us not neglect to ask the mercies he delights to grant. Should we never obtain the blessings we ask, yet the consciousness of having done our duty in asking will
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always administer satisfaction. But to this duty we are encouraged by the strongest assurances from the God of truth, that our prayers shall not ascend to heaven in vain; and that, if we reap not the immediate fruit of them, yet blessings will be laid up in store, and reserved for us against the great day of retribution.

SERMON

S E R M O N X I X .

O n D E A T H .

H E B . i x . 27 .

It is appointed unto men once to die.

TH E S E words lead to some considerations 'on that event which is appointed to all men : An event which need not to alarm, to intimidate, or afflict us ; since our religion assures us, that *though we die, yet shall we live* ; that though death closes the present scene of mortality, yet it draws aside the veil that now intercepts our prospect of futurity, and opens to us an entrance into another world, a world of endless and inconceivable bliss.

Death, indeed, is an object so much dreaded, so alarming to human nature ; it is so ghastly a form, and comes to us arrayed in such various terrors ; that Religion indeed may, but no Philosophy can ever enable us to conquer our fears, and meet the awful spectre with firmness and composure. It is religion only that can impart that fortitude. To him who has not been induced by religion to extend his views beyond this life, bitter must be the remembrance, formidable the image of death, as it breaks off his connection with visible nature, separates him from all that has hitherto engaged or delighted him, and puts an everlasting period to every idea of enjoyment.

The infidel, who acknowledges nothing in the human composition superior to matter and mechanism, who accounts the soul to be only the most subtle part of the brain, and expects that his whole being will soon dissolve and moulder into dust, not only debases the ho-

nour of his nature, but without one ray of pleasing hope to illuminate his mind, must become disconsolate, and gloomy as the prospect which lies before him. Religion, on the contrary, by acquainting us with the dignity of the soul, and the certainty of our future existence, brightens up our prospect; administers the highest consolation; alleviates our sufferings, and adds to our pleasures, by the anticipations of a superior happiness; and bids us wait for death with calmness and resignation, as an event that will introduce us to all the felicity allotted to our being.

From the words of the text, I shall take occasion to show, *1st*, Under what practical notions we should consider death; and, *2^{dly}*, Shall observe the religious advantages which may result from contemplating our dissolution.

I. We should consider death as an event certain and inevitable, in consequence of that irreversible sentence once pronounced to our first parents, and, in them, to all succeeding generations, That dust we are, and unto dust we must return;—in order that we may have a just sense of the transitory nature of all earthly objects and enjoyments, and, from serious impressions of the certainty of our departure out of this life, may be induced to provide for another, and to begin heaven here in the rectitude of our minds and the purity of our manners.

To this purpose, pious persons have put up their prayers to God, that he would let them know their end and the number of their days, that they might know how frail they were: not that they were strangers to the frailty of their nature, when thousands fell beside them; but their prayer was meant to implore Heaven to impress them with so devout a sense of their appointed time, as might influence their manners, might form their minds to due seriousness, and elevate their affections from earth to heaven.

It is not indeed required of us to be always meditating upon death; for that is impracticable. Such is our frame, and the constitution of the world, that there must
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be a time for other thoughts ; and a perpetual meditation on the last hour, however it may suit the solitude of a monastic, is incompatible with the duties of common life. But yet the idea of our mortality should predominate in our minds, as an habitual settled principle ; often, though not ever, present ; operating always, though not always perceived. Lest, indeed, by attending to the present, we should become unmindful of the future ; and, by being careful about things of the world, should neglect to provide for our departure out of it ; the providence of God sees fit to remind and admonish us of it, by exhibiting daily instances of the power and dominion of death, and sometimes showing, that the highest birth and distinction must yield to that king of terrors, that universal conqueror, who putteth all things under his feet.

Every example of mortality should renew the impressions of our own. Whenever, especially, we attend the obsequies of the dead, and pay the last honours to a departed friend, it might be useful to accustom ourselves to consider, that the same fate must one day be our own ; that soon we must, we know not how soon, be added to the number of those whose probation is past, and whose lot is decided ; and that though we cannot ascertain the period of that event, we may insure the consequence, by an uniform life of holiness and virtue, the best, the only, preparation for death.

The gay Atheist (if such there be) may drown reflection in intemperance ; and with dissolute levity say, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* But the wiser and more considerate Christian will commune with his heart, and thus resolve : “ Let me not remove my integrity from me, my righteousness let me hold fast ; let me not offend in thought or deed ; let every action be just, every intention pure, that nothing may stain my integrity or pollute my conscience : for I know, that *it is appointed unto all men once to die.* No vice, however pleasing, can be of long duration ; no iniquity, however prosperous, can constitute lasting happiness. Soon will the present transitory scene disappear ; and the

pleasures of the world, and the world itself, vanish from my sight : *Let me then keep innocence, and take heed to the thing that is right ; for that alone can bring me' peace at the last."*

But further : We should consider death as an event, not only certain and inevitable ; but as removed at no great, tho' an uncertain, distance. Were human life protracted to the same extent as before the flood, or were millions of years added to its natural term, even then it would be our undoubted wisdom to consider our latter end. But when life is reduced to the narrow compass of three or four score years, and when much the greater part of mankind are not permitted to reach one half even of that contracted span, it then surely becomes us to consider with seriousness the short duration of these mortal bodies, which bring into the world with them the principles of decay and dissolution, and are destined by the law of their nature to see corruption. It becomes us to reflect, that *our days are as an hand-breath, and our age as nothing ; that man cometh up, and flourisheth as a flower in the field, and is as soon cut down, and withered.*

For how fleeting and transitory is life ! at the longest, how short ! and at the best how frail ! What is it, but *a shadow that departeth, a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and vanisheth away ?* What repeated monitions have we of its frailty and uncertainty ! How many melancholy proofs are ever occurring to us, that man, *in his highest, best estate, is altogether vanity !* Exposed to the power of a thousand accidents, the arrows of death are perpetually flying around us ; and so many, so various, and unseen, are the causes of mortality, that we can neither know the time nor manner of our departure. Life and time are so unequally dispensed, and in such different portions, that no man may know the exact measure of his days, nor be certified how long he has to live. Some live long, and see good days ; and at last, by a gentle and gradual decay, the lamp of life goes slowly out. Others are snatched away in the midst of their years, and their light extinguished when appearing in its brightest lustre.

In the midst of life we are in death, i. e. subject to its power; but in what shape, or what stage of life, it will exert its power, is a knowledge we cannot attain. How long we may be permitted to walk before the LORD in the land of the living, or how soon we may descend into the chambers of the grave; whether the violence of external injury may forcibly dissolve the union between soul and body, or whether the inward disorder of our frame may render it necessary that the dust return unto the earth, and the spirit unto God that gave it; whether we may long lie on the bed of languishment, or whether we shall go down to the grave, as it is said we shall rise again, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; whether death shall with a gentle hand close our eyes without pain or apprehension, or whether he will march with all his terrors in array against us; whether our days shall be long in the land which the LORD our God giveth us, or whether we shall go whence none return, in the prime and vigour of our years; whether the evening of life may be bright, calm, and serene, or whether our sun may set in clouds;—HE alone, from whom no secrets are hid, can determine.

If, then, we know not the measure of our days; if we know neither the hour nor manner of our death, nor how soon we may be summoned to depart hence and be no more seen; we ought well to consider how frail and uncertain our condition is, to wait the doubtful hour, to be always prepared, that our LORD, when he cometh, may find us watching.

Again, we should consider death as an event that will consign us to an immediate state of happiness or misery. The Psalmist, indeed, addressing himself to the Supreme Being, says, *In death there is no remembrance of thee, and in the grave who will give thee thanks? The dead praise not thee, O Lord, neither they that go down to the grave.* But we are not hence to conclude, that the grave puts a period to our being. All that ought to be inferred from these, or other similar expressions, is, that, with regard to this world, we seem wholly devoid of sensation, incapable of pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, virtue

virtue or vice; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

Some who admit the future existence of departed souls, have yet conceived that their happiness or misery does not commence till the great day of retribution; and that the soul sleeps in a state of continued insensibility, till reunited to the body at the general resurrection. Among other false terrors with which death is clothed, this is not the least disconsolate image of it, that it is a state of darkness and oblivion without thought or sensation; where all the powers of the soul are chained up, and we are reduced to the same unconscious, inanimate state with our kindred earth, from whence we are formed. Human nature must shrink at so gloomy a prospect; and the good man, when departing from the world, must be much discomfited, when he reflects, that he is entering into a region of silence and of insensibility, where all his thoughts perish, where all his pious labours will profit him nothing, and where virtue and vice, justice and iniquity, the good and the bad, shall alike lie down in the dust, and, during the interval of a long succession of ages, sleep undistinguished.

In answer to which opinion, it may suffice to observe, that our Saviour's reply to the malefactor upon the cross was, *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.* By which expression our LORD cannot be supposed to mean, that death would deliver him over to a state of unconsciousness: For were this the state of departed souls, and this the intention of our LORD, he had promised nothing but what must equally have happened without such promise; he had given him no preference above his fellow-sufferer, and the hardened unrepenting criminal had been as much in paradise as the reformed and forgiven penitent.

It is evident, therefore, that by that expression of our LORD was meant an intermediate state of felicity antecedent to the final judgment into which he was to enter. After death, though the body sleeps in corruption till its scattered dust be recollected at the last day, yet the soul shall awake and live; shall subsist in its proper

per place, till the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised; when our happiness will be more complete, and receive its final consummation; and we shall become as the angels in heaven, confirmed and established in virtue and felicity.

II. The utility of the religious consideration of death was the second thing I proposed to observe.

And, 1st, It discovers to us the unimportance and vanity of all temporal enjoyments; which, however satisfactory or delightful, are yet short and transitory. It evinces the indiscretion of an intemperate attachment to the world. It serves to extend our views, and elevate our desires. And though the blessings of this life are such as we may with alacrity receive, and ought with gratitude to acknowledge; meant by Providence to render our passage through this vale of tears less irksome and unpleasant, to sweeten the bitter cup, and in some measure turn our heaviness into joy; yet fleeting is the joy, and its pleasures but for a season. All sublunary enjoyments are what we can place no dependence on, what we cannot long possess, what we must resign with our breath; and claim, therefore, only a portion of our care. But our state hereafter is eternal and unchangeable; the salvation of the soul is Heaven's last, greatest blessing, and demands our utmost attention.

This world, indeed, has little more to recommend it than the hopes and expectations it gives us of another; and this life should be esteemed chiefly as preparatory and introductory to a future.

But further: The religious consideration of death is the best guard of innocence and virtue. Temptations surround us on all sides. The corruption of our nature, and the seducement of the world, are in a perpetual combination and confederacy against our happiness. Every situation of life lies exposed to dangers, and in many things we all offend. To prevent which, nothing can be better adapted, nothing more effectual, than serious meditations on that eternity into which we must soon, and may suddenly, enter. As all worldly distinctions

tinctions, pomp, and power, and pleasure, and possessions, and whatever else the world calls happiness, will, at the solemn hour of a departing soul, lose all their reputed value, and be no longer of use; so the seducements they offer must lose much of their power and influence, when we reflect on the short and uncertain duration of these earthly tenements of ours, *these houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust.*

Lastly, The consideration of the certainty of our dissolution, as it is the most powerful incentive to a good life, is the best preparative for a comfortable death. Nothing dissipates the fears of death so much as due preparation for it; nothing so effectually disarms it of its terrors, as the consciousness of integrity, of our attention to please our Maker in the general conduct of our lives, and of our penitent concern for particular miscarriages. Happy they who have kept at a distance from the criminal pursuits, the guilty follies and corruptions, of the world; and have made such careful preparation for an hereafter, that they can, without self-reproach, review the years that are past, and look forward to a future life without apprehension or terror; can with pious confidence look beyond the grave, and there behold, not a court of severe justice, but a throne of mercy; not an offended, resentful Judge, but a reconciled Father and Saviour.

May it be our great and habitual concern to prepare to obey the solemn call, whenever it shall please the LORD of life and death to summon us to depart hence; that at the awful hour we may calmly lie down in peace, in hopes of awaking in a state of immortal felicity, of being introduced into the presence of the KING of heaven, and of being received with that happy congratulation, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou in to the joy of thy Lord!*

S E R M O N XX.

ON TRUST in GOD.

JER. xvii. 7.

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

WE are by nature formed with an inextinguishable desire of happiness, and have something within us that irresistibly impels us to the pursuit of it. But surrounded as we are with troubles, which we may complain of, but cannot redress; exposed to dangers we may always fear, but cannot always escape; and full of wants, which we are impatient, but unable to supply;—we soon become conscious of our inability to attain the happiness we pursue, and are soon taught the necessity of looking abroad for assistance to support our weakness, to supply our wants, and protect us from our fears. Our general error is, that we overlook the proper object of our confidence. We place our dependence on inferior causes, too inattentive to that First Supreme Cause, from whom alone can come our present or future salvation. But if reason does not, experience seldom fails to bring with it full conviction of the vanity of all temporal dependences. To a superior Power, then, we must have recourse: we must look up for support to where religion directs; to HIM whose kingdom is universal nature, to whom all things are in subjection, and without whose permission nothing can approach to hurt us. And it is our invaluable privilege, that we are permitted and authorised to repose a confidence in that Power whom all nature obeys.

But because a just confidence differs from a groundless presumption, I shall in this discourse consider, 1st, What

is a just confidence in God; *2dly*, When our confidence is well grounded; and, *lastly*, The happiness resulting from a well-grounded trust in him.

I. Let us consider what is a just confidence in God. This duty implies an humble dependence on him for that protection, and those blessings, which his supreme perfections both enable and incline him to bestow on his creatures. To trust in God, is to entertain a full conviction of his goodness and mercy; and a steady hope, that that mercy will on all occasions, in all our dangers and necessities, be extended to us, in such a manner as to his wisdom appears most conducive, if not to our tranquillity in this life, to our everlasting felicity in the next. In all circumstances, prosperous or adverse, whatever be our situation, or however gloomy our prospect, whether danger be approaching or present, our souls must wait still upon God, our eyes must be lifted up to him the great Arbiter of all events: for he, infinitely merciful and gracious, is at all times, in all emergencies, as willing as he is able to support and protect his creatures; never inaccessible to their addresses, never inexorable to their prayers, nor indifferent to their afflictions.

We are not indeed to expect, that his wisdom, infinitely superior to ours, will always comply with our expectations, and favour us with the particular objects of our desire; for this were to direct and govern his providence, not to trust in him: but we are to live under an habitual sense of his care and protection, and an assurance that under that protection we shall obtain what is good for us; which is more than we could promise ourselves, were the dispensations of Providence to be under our direction. This duty can hardly be so far misapprehended, as to repress the efforts of industry, or be supposed to supersede the necessity of due care and application to the employment and duties of our respective stations. For we have no grounds to expect, that God will provide for our interests, if we are improvident ourselves; or that he will, by a particular interposition, favour the idle and the negligent. But when we have performed all that on our part is requisite; when

all prudent care and attention have been employed, and every honest effort exerted, we need then be no farther solicitous; we may dismiss our fears: we may then confide in the wisdom and goodness of the Guardian of our nature; assured, that we are objects of his providence; that he is always vigilant over us; and that where our care terminates, the divine care will take place. Let the duty and business of to-day be our concern; the event of to-morrow we may trust to God.

II. Let us consider when our confidence in God is well grounded. And here we must observe, that our dependence or confidence in God, is founded upon his favour, and his favour is to be obtained only by our obedience. Whence it follows, that in such measure as we transgress the laws of God, in equal degree we undermine the foundation of our trust in him. Where our obedience is imperfect, there our trust is diminished, but not destroyed; where our transgression is absolute, there our confidence is absolutely lost. Thus our first progenitor, after presuming to disobey that injunction which was the appointed test of his duty and allegiance, lost all confidence in his MAKER, fled from his presence, and trembled with awful apprehensions of vengeance. *I heard thy voice, said our guilty parent to his CREATOR, and was afraid.* And in like manner must every flagitious sinner be afraid, when he hears his MAKER speaking to him, either from heaven, or in the still voice of conscience.

Our confidence, then, must rise or fall, according to the progress or defects of our obedience. Conscious of right intentions, and approved by our own heart, we may approach the throne of grace with superior assurance. If our heart in some degree condemn us, we may have our intervals of diffidence and apprehension; but if, unreclaimed, we go on still in wickedness, and persist in determined disobedience; should we then trust in God, it were, in the most literal and criminal sense, to hope against hope. Till we repent, and return to duty, we can have no expectations of favour

no confidence in our MAKER ; nor can we lift up our eyes to heaven with any hopes of mercy and forgiveness there.

But let it be observed, that however faulty or criminal we may have been, though the nature or number of our offences should suggest to us the displeasure of the DEITY, and give us grounds to fear that his protection and his grace may have deserted us ; that he may have withdrawn from us the light of his countenance, and the consolations of his Holy Spirit ; and that his mercy to us may be clean gone, and come utterly to an end for evermore ;--even here in this afflictive disorder, the most afflictive that the human heart can feel, even here we need not give way to despondency : let us return to GOD, and he will return to us ; let us look up to the FATHER of mercies ; let us, with holy violence, importune his favour and forgiveness ; let us, with unfeigned humiliation and amendment, endeavour to blot out our crimes, and expiate past offences ; and we may then resume confidence, and our hopes may securely rest on the benignity of our heavenly Parent, who desireth not the death of a sinner ; who is abundant in goodness, who never forgets to be gracious, and whose mercy pardons as often as we repent.

III. I proceed, in the last place, to observe the happiness resulting from a well-grounded dependence on God. Certain it is, that every other project we can form of security, will, upon inquiry, appear defective in its plan, and precarious in the event ; depending for success on various contingencies, on the aid, perhaps, of fellow-creatures, whose frame is frail and perishing, whose power is limited and feeble, and whose inclinations are fluctuating and uncertain. And if any of these circumstances should fail us, (and we can depend on none), our projects and our hopes are at an end. But he whose conscience speaks consolation, and bids him confide in his God, confides in a Wisdom which sees the remotest issues of all events, on a power which ordereth all things, and on a goodness which ever consults the well-being of his creatures.

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And though this gives him no absolute insurance against evils, no privilege of exemption from calamities and afflictions; yet he feels the weight of them much abated by internal consolations. He acquiesces in all the dispensations of Heaven, submits with humble resignation to the severities of Providence; assured, that God alone can know what is best, what is most expedient in his present circumstances, and what most instrumental to his future felicity. God, may he justly say, while I pay him the homage of due obedience, will be too merciful to neglect my happiness, and is too wise to be deceived in the most effectual means and properest seasons of conferring it. With these sentiments, he proceeds in his voyage through this ocean of life; resigned to the will, and confiding in the protection, of Providence; enjoying the present serenity, without apprehension of future tempests. But if the clouds should gather, and the storm arise, and the floods lift up their waves, and all around be distress and trouble, his heart is established, and will not shrink from his confidence in that Supreme Ruler, who can rebuke the storm; can save when we are ready to perish; and need only say, "Peace, be still," and immediately there will be a calm. In every situation, his mind reposes itself on God. In the darkest night of affliction, some light will spring up, some beam of joy dart upon his mind, from this consideration, that the God whom he serves is able to deliver, and in his own good time will deliver him out of all his troubles, or reward him with joys unspeakable in his own blissful presence. Thus *blessed is the man whose hope the Lord is.*

But, on the other hand, they who take not God for their strength, but build all their hopes upon their power, their riches, their reputation, their friendships, and the like, build upon a weak and treacherous foundation. Stability is not the property of any worldly possession. A thousand unforeseen causes may deprive them of such objects of their confidence, and too late convince them of the vanity of all temporal dependences. If they place

place their dependence on character and reputation, these may be soon blasted by popular breath; if on friendship, that often falls a sacrifice to clandestine whispers and artful insinuations: riches, by many secret ways, make themselves wings; and power, even the greatest, stands on a foundation which various engines are continually at work to undermine.

But such dependences, besides their uncertainty, are often utterly ineffectual and vain in those hours of distress when we stand in most need of support. If, for instance, sickness approaches, who but God can prescribe bounds to it, and say, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther*: If conscience should smite us with a sense of guilt, and the spirit be wounded within us, can man, can the whole world, say to the desponding sinner, *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee?*

From whence let us make this practical application, that he, and he alone, who has God for this confidence, whose conscious integrity gives him well-grounded assurances of the divine favour, has such an internal comforter in his breast as will support him under all the vicissitudes of this mortal life; will make trouble in some degree sit easily on him; will inspire fortitude in the midst of dangers; will carry him through the rugged paths of adversity; will sweeten the bitter waters of affliction; will disarm even our last enemy of his terrors, and render even our dissolution a happy emigration to a state of immortality.

Let us then, while we have opportunity, endeavour to acquire this greatest of all consolations, this confidence in our God by an universal obedience to his laws. Let this obedience be the ground-work in our plan of happiness. On this foundation we may build the firmest hopes, and securely trust, that the God whom we serve will with his favourable kindness defend us as with a shield; will bless us with his gracious protection in this world; and in the world to come will receive us into that fullness of bliss, which no language can describe, and no human intellect can as yet comprehend,

S E R M O N XXI.

On universal OBEDIENCE.

LUKE i. 6.

Walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

THAT sin and wickedness must render us just objects of the divine displeasure, and expose us to deserved punishment here or hereafter, is a sentiment which nature suggests, and has engraven on our hearts in characters too deep for all the arts of irreligion ever to efface. This sentiment must sometimes occur to us in our hours of reflection; must sometimes force its way into the mind, through all the obstacles we can employ to exclude and guard our attention from it. The good man is indeed under no temptation to exclude it from his thoughts; as to him, it brings no terrors or disquietudes, and serves only to support and establish his integrity. But sinners feel the apprehensions of it so painful, it so often mingles gall with their pleasures, and so much embitters every enjoyment, that all the projects, artifices, and delusions of sin, are employed to weaken its impressions, and rescue them from their fears.

Hence it is, that some are inclined to take refuge in Atheism; some in a partial religion; some endeavour, by disbelief, to remove the Almighty Object of their fear; others hope he may be appeased by a very imperfect obedience. But the existence of a God is so obvious and apparent to our first reflections, the whole Creation is so clear a demonstration of a CREATOR, that recourse is oftener had to some mediating expedients,
which

which may reconcile vice and duty, and provide an equal satisfaction for the different demands of inclination and religion. And of these projects none has perhaps more generally prevailed than an opinion, that God will accept of a partial, defective obedience; as the infirmities of the nature he has given us render a perfect and universal observance of his laws utterly impracticable.

Hence it is, that some satisfy themselves with a very lax, incomplete morality; practising the virtues they approve, neglecting others to which they have no inclination; and prevail on their consciences to acquiesce in the avowed violation of some duties, while they think they supply this defect by a faithful and strict observance of others.

It may be proper, therefore, to undeceive those who are thus willing to deceive themselves in so important a point, by showing, that God requires an equal attention to all his laws; that we can come to no composition with him, by offering a part instead of the whole debt we owe him; that while we live in an habitual transgression of some duties, we can give him no equivalent in a punctual observance of others; and that we ought to aim at the character given to Zacharias and Elisabeth in the text, and walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. To this end, I shall show, 1st, In what sense an universal obedience is required; and, 2^{dly}, Our obligation to observe it.

I. It is necessary, above all things, that our obedience be not partial; that we attend not to one duty, one species of virtue, one part of right conduct, to the neglect of others, but regard with equal and sincere zeal every precept of religion. We must be consistently and thoroughly good, if we would be so effectually. We must yield ourselves entirely and universally to the government of conscience, conquer every adverse passion, subdue every opposite inclination; or lay no claim to true virtue, and give up all hopes of the felicity in reserve for it.

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But it is not meant that we are to be perfect ; absolutely free from every failure ; never to be surprised into any irregularity by inadvertence or the sudden ferment of our passions : for this is a happiness, devoutly to be wished indeed, but not to be attained till we ascend to where the spirits of just men are made perfect. Such is the present unhappiness of our frame, that some weaknesses and infirmities will cleave to the best ; and it is morally impossible always to keep our passions under such severe discipline and strict regulation, that they shall never precipitate or betray us into a conduct which our reason may disapprove. But offences of this venial nature God will not be extreme to mark, nor visit them with future inflictions. Far be that from the Judge of the whole earth,—far from a gracious and merciful God : for who then could be saved ? who, in a strict sense, is righteous ? who can deceive himself so far as to say he has never sinned ?

The nature of sin consists in an opposition of our will to the will of God. When, therefore, weakness, inadvertence, or surprise, betray us into an irregular action, in which there is little or no intended concurrence of the will, we should seem to be more the objects of pity than of condemnation ; and such an action appears rather the effect of native infirmity, than an actual crime. But though a complete, unfailing obedience, is a tribute which the Sovereign of the world does not exact, nor can the infirmity of our nature pay ; yet he requires an equal regard to all his laws, and forbids the habitual indulgence of any single vice. It must indeed be admitted, that natural disposition, habits acquired by education, and confirmed by practice, the influence of example, our situation in the world, and the seducements we happen to be exposed to, may render the observance of some particular duties no easy task. But in such cases God regards the rectitude of our intentions : if we do all in our power to please God, we cannot offend him ; if we faithfully endeavour not to violate our duty, we perform it. But if we deliberately refuse obedience to any one law, and live in an habitual determined neglect of

it,—this is, not merely to offend, but to rebel : this is not infirmity or frailty, but a resolved opposition to, and an avowed defiance of, the authority of the divine Law-giver.—Which leads me,

II. To consider the obligation we are under to pay an universal obedience to his laws. *Whoever*, says our Saviour, *shall break one of the least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven*: i. e. Whoever, by his doctrine or practice, makes void or transgresses the divine commands, by the omission of any known duty, or the commission of any known sin, shall be the least, or (as it has been interpreted) shall have no place in the kingdom of heaven. Strict, unreserved obedience is what the scriptures every where enjoin.

The divine sanction is alike impressed on every law of God ; and to go on in a customary tract of disobeying him in any one injunction, is in effect to disclaim all obedience to him. No one part of our moral duty is intrinsically more sacred and indispensable than another ; nor have we grounds to believe that God will pardon the deliberate, habitual transgression of any one of his laws. For if God might, consistently with the rectitude and perfection of his nature, excuse or pardon one habitual transgression, why not another, and another, and consequently why not all ? His mercy is indeed ever inclined to meet and receive the returning penitent, and to blot out the remembrance of those sins which are forsaken ; but most certainly he will not pardon any one species of iniquity in which we wilfully and impenitently persevere.

Let it be considered, that the reason against all sin is the same, *viz.* the divine prohibition ; and if that be our motive for shunning any criminal behaviour, it may be expected to have an equal influence on every part of our conduct. If we abstain from any one sin, solely for this reason, Because it is offensive to the infinite purity and holiness of God, we shall find the same motive still more extensive in its operation, and urging us to avoid every occasion of incurring his displeasure. But if we

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select only some virtues that happen not to thwart our temper and inclinations, while we neglect others equally necessary and indispensable, we can hardly be supposed to act, even in those instances wherein our conduct seems to be laudable, from a regard to duty, or the authority of our Maker. The habitual violation of any one divine law, or the retention of any one favourite vice, demonstrates, that had we equal temptations, we should equally transgress in other instances. As long as any passion preserves an ascendancy over us, and remains rebellious and lawless, there is plainly something within us more regarded than duty, something more prevalent than virtue; something that masters and subdues it; God and Conscience have not the dominion: till we possess an equal, entire affection for goodness, we possess none that is truly acceptable; nor can be reputed of much value.

But if an uniform, unreserved, and complete obedience, be required; if the purity of the divine nature must disapprove every degree and species of iniquity; if he forbids the commission of any one sin, or the violation of a single duty;—who then, may the sinner urge, can be saved? If so *strait is the gate, and so narrow the path, that leads to eternal life*, no wonder, he may think, *if there be few that find it*.

Where then, may he say, is the goodness of the CREATOR? where the mercies of the Gospel; and what are the gracious promises that are contained in it? But notwithstanding what may be thus urged, most certain it is, that it is our own fault, if we are not objects of those mercies, and partakers of those promises. Strict, indeed, is our religion, and pure and holy are its precepts; they would otherwise be unbecoming the purity of that BEING who enjoined them. But he expects not perfection from imperfect beings: he requires not from men the purity of angels: he imposes no heavier burden than he has given us ability to bear: he requires from us only what is in our power,—an honest and sincere, not a perfect, unerring observance of his laws.

If, then, it appears, that our obligation to every duty is sacred and indispensable; and if we are apt to retain and cherish with partial indulgence some one vice, some favourite failing, which by flattering our inclinations, recommends itself perhaps almost imperceptably to us, —how much reason have we to look with an attentive eye into our heart, and carefully observe all its movements and propensions? None but the most abandoned will go on in an open and avowed course of impiety; and a person of but common virtue will be shocked at the commission of an atrocious and glaring crime: but the greatest danger is, lest we should not sufficiently guard against those vices, which, recommended by custom or fashion, or introduced under the disguise perhaps, and resemblance, of some virtue, gradually and insensibly insinuate themselves into our affections, whilst we are inattentive, and think our piety secure.

Let us therefore often inspect and examine our hearts, and look well if there be any way of wickedness in us; and let us resolve to dismiss every sinful inclination as soon as discovered, and to retain none, though ever so secret, nor spare it, though ever so beloved. Vices are the diseases of the mind: a complication of them is not required: one inveterate disorder is sufficient to ruin the soul's health, and endanger its salvation.

For though God will not be extreme to mark what is amiss, not extreme to mark infirmities or imperfections; yet he will not confer heaven on those who wilfully and deliberately go on in the habitual practice of any one transgression; nor does he in the gospel give them any grounds to believe that they will ever be the objects of his favour, or ever be put on a level with those who pay a sincere obedience to the whole law. We have no grounds to think, that the supreme Lawgiver will for our sake soften and relax the terms of salvation; or that he will grant a dispensation for favourite passions, or permit us to select from the catalogue of duties such as most recommend themselves to our taste.

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In every instance, his authority is sacred, and demands universal submission. We must offer up our whole heart to God; and this sacrifice, like those prescribed by the Mosaic law, must be entire and without blemish.

Let us then remember, that religion requires an uniform regard to the whole system of duties. Let no vice become such a favourite as to gain indulgence, and no duty appear of such slight consequence as to be overlooked and neglected. We ought indeed to give greater attention to the more important duties, such as piety to God, and justice and benevolence to men; but yet no grace or virtue of inferior consideration is to be overlooked, and no sin to be thought unimportant or trivial which may offend God, and endanger and diminish our future portion of happiness. Let us then have respect unto all God's commandments: let our ways be so direct, that we may keep all his statutes: let us give a general discharge to all irregular desires, and all false ways let us utterly abhor.

S E R M O N XXII.

On the universal PRESENCE and KNOW- LEDGE of GOD.

PROV. v. 21.

*The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he
pondereth all his goings.*

THE DEITY has been pleased to communicate to his creatures, by reason and revelation, only a limited information concerning himself. It is not in this world given to us to see or know the Supreme BEING as he is; we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection; clouds and thick darkness are round about him; his nature infinitely surpasses all our conceptions. But yet our knowledge of him may suffice, and our ideas are clear enough, for all the purposes of morality and duty. The knowledge of the Divine Nature, so far as is necessary to virtue and religion, may be acquired by a common understanding; but more than this, human sagacity and penetration will in vain attempt to investigate.

That there is a GOD, the Creator and moral Governor of the world; that it is his will that we should do justly and love mercy, and observe and practise all the virtues and duties that reason and nature suggest; that he approves and will reward the good, and disapprove the disobedient,—are truths as evident as they are useful: truths which lie level and obvious to the mind; which Reason, when its eye is not blinded, cannot fail to discern; and without which, virtue, morality, or true religion, would but ill subsist. But that God should thus limit our knowledge of him; that he should
unveil

unveil just so much of his nature as religion requires to be known, and is requisite to direct and conduct us to universal virtue; should seem to intimate, that the duties of religion and virtue ought to be our first objects, and an attention to them the principal concernment of life.

The doctrine of the text, relative to the Divine BEING, is an important and useful truth. For what can have a more extensive moral influence, or more effectually arm and guard us against all seducements to vice, and keep up our attention to duty, and animate us to every virtuous exertion, than a firm persuasion, and frequent recollection, that the ways of men are before the eyes of the LORD, and that he pondereth all our goings; that we are always under his inspection; that no obscurity, no solitude can conceal us from him; that even the darkest and most secret retirement in the world, the human heart, is naked before him, and lies open to his view?

Such sentiments of the Divine Omnipresence should render us particularly attentive to our whole conduct; and deter us, not only from flagrant and deliberate offences, but from such lesser failures as are incident from inattention and neglect: should animate us, not only to hold fast our integrity, and act always with the purest and most upright intentions; but to excel in every virtue, to adorn ourselves with every moral grace that can recommend us to the favour of that Being who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Certain it is, that God is every where present; that he exists at all times, in all places. His Being surpasses all bounds, is diffused through all extent, coexists and is present with all things; for in him all things have their being. And as he exists in all places, so he necessarily perceives and knows all things. His knowledge is commensurate with his existence, absolutely unlimited, infinite as his duration, boundless as his immensity. No actions or sentiments can exist without his instantaneous inspection. His knowledge, in respect of universal nature;

ture, is like the sun with regard to this lower world,—nothing can be hid from the light thereof.

Our actions particularly, we are assured, are the objects of his knowledge. *The ways of man*, says Solomon in the text, *are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* He seeth all his doings, he marketh all his steps. The LORD is a GOD of knowledge; by him actions are weighed: and there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can be hid. *Doth he not see all my ways*, says Job, *and count all my steps?* He not only sees and observes our actions, but all the circumstances that attend them, all the degrees of good or evil that are in them, even such as are unknown and imperceptible to ourselves.

But not only our exterior conduct is visible and apparent to him, but also the motives upon which we act, the views we have in acting, the disposition of our minds, our darkest and most retired thoughts and intentions. The LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. *The Lord*, says Solomon, *weigheth the spirits*; i. e. has a perfect discernment and knowledge of the heart, as men have of those things which they weigh with accuracy in a balance. He is always with us; always surrounds us with his presence, penetrates into the inmost recesses of the soul, observes all its movements, discerns its most secret purposes. Nothing, indeed, can be hid from those eyes which are every where, and to which all things are naked and open, all hearts uncovered and transparent.

But though it is an undoubted certainty, that God is thus present in every place, present to all we do and all we think; yet of the mode or manner of the divine presence and perception, we can form no idea. This may be one of those secret things belonging to God, which the human intellect cannot at present comprehend; or which, if understood, would be of no service,—bring with it no advantage to the cause of virtue and religion; the principle, if not the sole end of God's revealing himself to man.

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It is, doubtless, expedient and necessary, in order to keep us steady in the paths of duty; and highly consequential to our happiness here and hereafter; that we should be assured, that the eye of God is ever open to observe all our thoughts and actions; that the darkness and light to him are both alike; that he is intimate to our spirits; that as well may we attempt to conceal our sentiments from ourselves, as from his all-seeing eye; and therefore these important truths have been revealed. But if we proceed further to ask, How can the Divine BEING penetrate the heart? how discern our thoughts? how see the secret part we act in our breast? what we do invisibly, in imagination only and design?—these particulars it is not possible,—we may presume, therefore, not needful for us to know.

But although the manner in which the Supreme BEING discerns our thoughts or actions may be far above our comprehension; yet we may affirm, negatively, that *he doth not see as man seeth*. The scriptures indeed represent him generally, as it were, in the likeness of men, with his eyes upon our ways, and his ears open to our prayers; expressions that are used in condescension to the defects of human language, and to the weakness of human apprehension, which is so imperfect and limited, that we cannot form a conception how objects can be seen or heard without the instrumentality of proper organs. But it is more suitable to the nature of HIM in whom we live and have our being, to conceive him present and privy to all our thoughts and actions, in some such manner as our minds are present to their own sentiments and ideas.

Let us then reflect; how attentive we ought to be to our whole conduct, how guarded and circumspect in all we do and all we think,—as we are at this, and every moment of our lives, under the immediate ever watchful inspection of an infinitely wise, and pure, and righteous, and powerful Being, who pondereth all our ways, observes and records all our actions and intentions, and will also one day bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good,

or whether it be evil. Then God, whose eye nothing can escape, will pronounce on every one a just and irreverfible fentence. The evil we only intended, though not committed, fhall not go unpunifhed: the good we only defigned, and for want of power could not accomplifh, fhall not be unrewarded.

What is it then that can tempt us to offend our MAKER, in oppofition to the moft powerful, and did not experience otherwife inform us, we fhould think, irrefiftible motives and incitements to obedience? When the difhoneft, fraudulent man, mifemploys his underftanding, given for a far different and better purpofe, in over-reaching and defrauding others, injuring and oppreffing thofe whom he ought to protect and affift; let him remember, that the eye of a moft powerful and righteous God is upon him, whofe vengeance he can no more efcape, than he can hide his iniquity from his view; and he muft furely refolve to turn from his wickednefs, and do what is lawful and right. Does the heart of the proud, vain man, fwell and dilate with the idea of his fupposed eminence and prefumed diftinction? let him confider in whofe prefence he ftands; in the prefence of that infinitely glorious BEING, the Sovereign of the univerfe, in whofe fight man is but a worm, all the nations of the earth as the duft of the balance; and he muft feel what the fon of Sirach long ago obferved, That pride was not made for man. Do we at any time affume the veil of piety, and put on the mask of religion, and honour God with our lips whilft our heart is far from him? let us reflect, how thin the veil we wear, and how transparent to the eye of God.

While thus what paffes within us we think fecure from human obfervation, let us afk ourfelves, Doth not HE that pondereth the heart, confider it? and he that keepeth our foul, doth not HE know it? Nothing can put a more effectual check to iniquity, irregularity, or impropriety of conduct, than a due fense of the Divine Prefence; a fense and conviction, that all our ways are before God; that he ftands at our right-hand; that to his view are expofed our moft fecret follies and iniquities; thofe

those which we would wish to conceal from the eye of the world, and, if it were possible, from ourselves.

The scriptures often remind us to consider ourselves as walking always before God, always under the observation of his eye; which ought to make us infinitely more vigilant and attentive to our conduct, than if the whole world were spectators of it. And indeed, what can more affect the mind of man, than the consideration that we live under the inspection of a perfectly holy and omnipotent BEING, who is always about us and within us, as intimate to us as the soul is to the body, as inseparable from us as we are from ourselves: that his eye sees all our ways; marks all our steps; attends our going out, and our coming in; goes along with us from our first entrance into the world, till we depart out of it: that he pierceth the thickest darkness, penetrates into the closest recesses and deepest designs of the heart: that our most secret wishes and most conspicuous actions, lie equally open to his view: that no where can we cover ourselves, not even our thoughts, from his eye; no where retire from his presence, for it fills the universe? *If we ascend into the heaven, he is there; if we go down to hell, he is there also. If we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall his hand lead, and his right hand shall hold us. If we say, Surely the darkness shall cover us, even the night shall be light about us. Yea the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and light to him are both alike.* To this omnipresent and omniscient God be ascribed all honour and adoration, now and for ever!

S E R M O N XXIII.

CAUSES of ERROR.

LUKE xi. 35.

*Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not
darkness.*

IN the verse preceding the text, our Saviour observes, *the light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness.* Which words may be thus paraphrased: "The reason or moral judgment of a man is to the mind what the eye is to the body. If this moral judgment has a true discernment of things, and its directions be pursued, it will point out and conduct us in the paths of rectitude and truth. But as, when the eye is blinded, the body must of necessity move in darkness; so, if the moral judgment, the eye of the mind, the directing principle of our actions, lose its discernment, or be itself darkened by prejudices and passions, we shall deviate from virtue and truth, and wander whithersoever imperfect notions or false opinions may lead us." Our LORD therefore subjoins, *Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness.* "Take care that the moral judgment, the intellectual light of the mind, be not clouded or obscured." For this light, placed in us by our CREATOR to direct us in the paths of virtue and happiness, may be obscured and extinguished. The eye of the mind, though naturally formed for the discernment of truth, may, from several causes, suffer in its faculty of perception; and our intellectual sight may, by various disorders, be injured and obstructed.

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In order, therefore, that we may comply with the admonition in the text, let us enquire, what are the principal prevailing and general causes of error and wrong judgment in matters of religion.

I. And the first of these is negligence, indifference, inattention,—the certain inlets of error. For it is not the mere uncultivated faculty of reason, that informs and illuminates the mind; but the vigorous exercise, the careful culture and improvement of it, by frequent attention, application, and enquiry. Providence has appointed application and industry to be as requisite to the information and improvement of the mind, as labour and exercise are to the health and vigour of the body. There are difficulties in religion; in the scriptures, some things hard to be understood; and in our understanding, much weakness and imperfection. Without due attention, therefore, we must wander in darkness and ignorance, and fall into inevitable errors; but with it we may acquire wisdom and truth, so much at least as is necessary to salvation.

To us favoured as we are with the light of the gospel, truth is not so difficult to investigate, as it was to those who lived in ages unenlightened by revelation. Philosophers of ancient times complained, that truth was inaccessible, and lay concealed deep in an abyss, where no labour, assiduity or industry, could ever find her. And similar to this sentiment are some expressions in the book of Job: *There is, says he, a vein for the silver, and iron is taken out of the earth; but where shall wisdom be found? where is the place of understanding?* It is the happier lot of Christians to know where wisdom, what best deserves the name of wisdom, is to be found. To us the avenues to truth are open. Let us search the Scriptures; for there is the place of understanding. *Let us then, as the Royal Preacher advises, carefully apply our hearts unto this wisdom; let us seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures: then shall we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: then shall we understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path.*

Inattention

Inattention and indifference, with respect to religion, are unhappily to be numbered among the characteristic evils of modern times. Many there are who excuse themselves the trouble of inquiry, take their religion upon trust, implicitly comply either with received or fashionable opinions, regardless either of the foundation or consequences of their principles. Happy, if by accident they are right; but in this uncultivated state of mind, this neglected soil, if the seeds of error should be sown, seldom or never can they be rooted out.

II. Another common cause of error and intellectual darkness is sensuality. And this consequence it must always produce, according to the natural course of things; for, by indulging the passions, it indisposes the mind for the contemplation or search of truth. It impairs and depresses the very faculty of reason, and renders it unfit for intellectual employment. It corrupts even the taste, and vitiates the relish of rational pleasure. For sensuality and reason are principles so different, that if the former be our favourite entertainment, we shall pay less regard to the latter; and gradually contract, perhaps, both an indisposition and an incapacity for the just exertion of it. But in an uncommon degree does sensuality oppose religious truth, which it considers as its enemy and accuser, and avoids as a hated intruder on its peace. The sensualist who will lay no restraints upon himself, is ever averse to the restraints of religion, ever averse to those principles which would intermingle his enjoyments with guilty suspicions that would awake him from his pleasing delusion, and torture him with the pain of not being able to justify what he resolves not to amend.

On the other hand, freedom from sensual excesses and irregular passions, is not only an argument that a man is wise, but has a natural tendency to make him more so. All corrupt passions, like a false medium, misrepresent, and give their own tincture to every thing we view; whereas a pure mind, like a clear eye, has a distinct perception of objects, and sees them in their true colour.

III. Prejudice

III. Prejudice is another cause of erroneous judgment. So extensive and absolute is the dominion of prejudice, that perhaps all men are more or less under bondage, and no one entirely free from its chains and out of its power. And unhappily its power is too prevalent, where it ought not to appear, in religious inquiries; and always governs most absolutely where its influence is least suspected. Hence it is, that we see men so determined in support of favourite opinions; maintaining, with obstinacy, errors that have been once received; and, in defence of them, holding out against the clearest light of evidence, and resisting every means of conviction. Opinions that have been long familiar to the mind, we grow fond of; we take them, as it were, under our protection, we cherish them with the partiality of friendship, and discourage every attempt against them.

This influence of Prejudice is most observable in the opinions or principles we imbibe in our early years. It is a fortunate circumstance, if they happen to be agreeable to truth; but if otherwise, our prepossession in their favour seldom permits us to part with them. Such principles are considered as standard-truths; and all other opinions are afterwards measured by them, and received or rejected as they appear to conform to or differ from them. Hence it is, that errors in religion are almost infinite, though it infinitely concerns men to guard against them: hence all the various sects of Christians adhere generally to their respective tenets, however contradictory to reason, truth, or scripture; and hence the way of every individual appears right in his own eyes; and in the midst of error, danger, and deception, he enjoys all the confidence of security and truth.

IV. Another means of obscuring and perverting the judgment, is some prevailing inclination, passion, or affection. That our affections are generally consulted, and that not only our actions, but even our opinions, are too much influenced by them, is a sad truth. A slight acquaintance with human nature will inform us, that the affections can bribe and corrupt the judgment; and that

that the understanding is frequently the dupe of the passions. When the passions are engaged on one side of a question, how difficult is it to observe a just impartiality? Is the evidence defective on the agreeable side? imagination is ready to lend its aid, to dress up fiction and falsehood in the garb of truth, and to give to possibilities the appearance of probability and proof. Is any disagreeable, unwelcome truth to be introduced to us? with what difficulty does it get admittance? An unwelcome truth finds every avenue of the soul barred against it. By the assistance of the prevailing passion, we can practise upon the evidence of truth, and keep it out of sight, and judge and determine just as inclination dictates.

And this is not only in speculative matters, but even in points immediately relative to conduct and manners. Let a man, *e. g.* be engaged in some criminal pursuit, and under the influence of a governing passion; how difficult is it to show him to himself, and make his guilt appear to him in a true light? Represent to him the unreasonableness, the baseness, the odious nature, the destructive tendency of his favourite vice; make it appear that it is the child of Folly, and must be the parent of Sorrow and Remorse; describe its fatal train of consequences in this world, and alarm him with all the terrors of the next;—what will generally be the consequence? Will he discern and acknowledge his guilt, and return from the error of his ways? or will not rather his ways too often appear to him right, though the end thereof be the ways of death? He will give a softer appellation to his vice, paint it in milder colours, and represent it in the form and with the features of virtue: or perhaps he will wish and hope, that the terrors of futurity may be only pious delusions, or the fears and fictions of fancy; and these hopes and wishes will be made to serve instead of argument and evidence, and be worked up gradually into proof and conviction.

Again, is interest or gain the object of the leading passion? Its influence in corrupting and misleading the understanding is universally admitted. Seldom are arguments

guments justly weighed when interest holds the scales. This passion can put out the eye of Reason, or throw such a veil over it, as obstructs the light, intercepts the strongest rays of truth, and makes men judge and determine in opposition to the clearest evidence.

In like manner, if an affectation of superior wisdom should be the ruling passion, this also is an enemy to impartial judgment and to truth. To persons of this cast, evidence and truth are not objects, so much as fame and distinction. Vanity can find no gratification in admitting opinions received by the multitude. Instead of walking in a plain beaten road, they love, therefore, to quit the common tracks of opinion, to search for new ways, and to strike out into by-paths of their own. They consider it as a mark of vulgar understanding to concur in their judgment with others, and go along with the multitude; and therefore treat with contempt all received or established opinions, merely for being such. This gives a bias to all their inquiries, and draws them aside from the way of truth.

This pride of understanding perverts and misleads the judgment as much as inattention, sensuality, prejudice, interest or any other prevailing passion. For which reason we find that it is not always the superior genius that best understands Religion; and that men of the most eminent abilities are sometimes strenuous opponents of truth, and zealous advocates of error, when their minds happen to be under the influence of intellectual pride, or the vanity of affected wisdom.

V. Lastly, The greatest obstacle to religious truth is a vicious disposition. *Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* When the light of truth is offensive, we shut our eyes against it. A vicious man hates the restraint of religious principles. With the practice, therefore, he is tempted to throw aside the profession of religion. Resolved not to part with his vices, he parts with his faith, in order to be more at ease, and have less interruption in his pursuits.

Thus it may in some measure appear, by what various causes the moral judgment of the mind may be depraved, and the light within us become darkness.

If, then, we would give obedience to the instruction in the text, if we would act with wisdom or virtue, let us, to the utmost of our power, endeavour to avoid the various occasions of error which have been mentioned. Let us not wander in the dark, from indifference, inattention, or prejudice; let not sensual excesses put out the light of reason; let not the seductive counsels of interest, nor the affectation of superior discernment, lead us astray from the paths of true wisdom. Let us keep a strict watch over every favourite passion, affection, and inclination, knowing how apt they are to deceive and mislead. Let us above all things, resolve to do the will of God, and be what we ought to be; and then we may be assured, that we shall know all that is necessary to be known in order to obtain his favour: *If any man will do his will, says our blessed Saviour, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* We may continue ignorant, indeed, of some truths contained in the scriptures; but of none that are essential to salvation, and necessary to our acceptance with God. Against that danger, our Saviour's assurance has given us full security.

And indeed the consideration of the wisdom and goodness of God will not permit us to doubt, but that his favour will be granted, and his happiness communicated to us on the just and reasonable terms of exerting our powers in the best manner we can to please him, and our honest endeavours to know and to do his will. If, therefore, we have an internal testimony in our favour, if our heart bears witness to our diligence in inquiring, and our disposition to receive whatever we can discover to be the will of God, we need not afflict ourselves with suspicions and apprehensions of error; but may have good grounds to trust that his Spirit will lead us to all necessary truth, and will point out the way when we are desirous to walk in it.

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To aid our endeavours, let us not fail to implore the Father of light, the everlasting Source of knowledge, to dart some rays of heavenly wisdom into our hearts; to illuminate our understandings; to direct our steps in obedience to his law; and to conduct us through these shades of ignorance, this veil of darkness and of error, to where wisdom dwells; to those regions of pure unclouded light, where both truth and happiness are to be found.

S E R M O N XXIV.

DANGER of a late PENITENCE.

Preached in Lent.

ISAIAH lv. 7.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

THIS season of Lent, the piety of the Christian church has, from her earliest and purest ages, set apart and consecrated to penitence and devotion. The observance of this ancient and pious institution is wisely prescribed, in order to remind us of our religious obligations; and that they whose disinclination to the task of repentance will ever be urging some pretexts for deferring it, might be induced, by the admonition of the church, and by the influence of example, to enter upon it at this season; to apply, with a particular vigilance, to the revival of their spiritual conduct; and by a serious attention to the laws of God, by frequent meditation and prayer, and, if these be not sufficient, by abstinence and fasting, to endeavour to correct the wrong propensions of their nature, to reform the disorders of the soul, and to introduce contrary habits of piety and virtue; which ought not to expire with the season, but should be carried on, continued, and improved, as long as we continue in our present state of probation.

Though the obligation to repentance is at all seasons equal, yet expedient it is to fix some stated periods, wherein a more diligent scrutiny is to be made into the state and condition of the soul; wherein we are
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to search with more than common vigilance into our imperfections and corruptions, and observe what error wants to be rectified, what passion to be subdued, what infirmity to be strengthened, and what virtue to be improved; wherein we are to call off the mind from other cares and pursuits, to the most important pursuit of all, the care of the one thing needful. This period the wisdom of the church has thought fit to determine; lest her sons, undetermined, might be tempted to defer all attempts towards amendment, till the approach of death should prevent it, or the growing power and influence of sinful habits might render it impracticable.

In this discourse I shall, *1st*, Consider the nature of penitence; and, *2^{dly}*, that we may not postpone this important duty, shall show, That we can have no assurance of salvation from a dying sorrow, or what is commonly called a deathbed-repentance.

Let us consider the nature of penitence. The first preparatory step towards penitence is contrition, or a virtuous sorrow and self-reproach for past offences. When we have a just sense of our offences, of our disobedience and ingratitude to the Highest and Best of Beings, and of the consequent danger to which we stand exposed,—both nature and religion prescribe a serious, penitential concern, for having offended; a concern proportioned to the measure of our sins, and as deep as our guilt. What naturally occurs to the first reflections of a penitent, is the criminality of his conduct; and this he cannot seriously review, without an afflicting sense of his unworthiness, without sorrow and self-abhorrence, without painful sensations of remorse from the accusations of his own heart. And if ours be an ingenuous sorrow, and our hearts are penetrated with a conviction of guilt, it will be accompanied with a determined purpose of amendment, and sincere resolutions of future obedience. The severest grief, if not productive of this effect, is not penitential, and should seem rather to add to the measure of our iniquities, and to the inflictions of divine justice, as it speaks a mind conscious of its iniquity

quity, and yet persisting in opposition to its own convictions.

But further : Penitence, in the scripture notion of it, implies not only sorrow for sin, not only a resolution of amendment ; but a new and actual obedience, an actual progress in piety and virtue. A good resolution, till it produces the fruits of repentance, is still only a principle of obedience, but not obedience itself. Habitual offenders must not only begin, but accomplish, a moral change of temper and manners, an entire correction of their inclinations and passions, and must form anew the disposition of the mind. Penitence, in its true sense, is not meant to supply the place of righteousness, is not any thing substituted in its stead, but is indeed righteousness itself, and is to be considered only as another name for religion or moral goodness.

II. I proceed to show, that we can have no assurance of salvation from what is usually called a death-bed repentance. And this may appear from the following considerations.

1st, It is uncertain whether the sorrow expressed by the sinner at such a juncture be sincere, and whether the resolutions of reformation which he then forms would be productive of actual obedience. The tears of expiring sinners, there is room to suspect, flow not so much from a virtuous sorrow, from an ingenuous remorse, from due conviction of the hateful nature of sin, and of their ingratitude to Heaven, as from the near prospect of an approaching dissolution, and the immediate apprehensions of impending vengeance.

To express the anguish of our soul upon a death-bed, when all our prospects are gloomy ; when to the eye of faith no beam of hope, no distant ray of happiness, appears ; when we can see nothing behind us but unrepented guilt, and nothing before us but the apprehended consequences and just punishment of it,—is natural and unavoidable ; and all the pious resolutions, all the vows of reformation and amendment, then made, may have in them little or no virtue. Experience shows, that
 ease,

ease, security, and health, often cancel the vows made by apprehension, pain, and sickness; and that all the religious remorse, the penitential tears, the purposes of obedience, extorted from a dying sinner by the terrors of dissolution and the approach of futurity, vanish and disappear, *like as a dream when one awaketh*, without any impression of virtue left upon the mind, as soon as a recovery from sickness removes those apprehensions, and that prospect, from his view. As the fear of immediate death vanishes, good resolutions are forgotten; and as bodily strength recovers, folly and vice recover strength too.

But let us admit a death-bed sorrow to be sincere, and of so ingenuous a nature that it would be certainly effectual in producing true repentance were an opportunity of the trial allowed; yet still, as it is only sorrow, accompanied with a pious resolution, it is only a step towards repentance, but not repentance complete. For the scripture-idea of repentance, as was before observed, implies not only sorrow for sin, not only a steady purpose of amendment, but that purpose carried into execution by a new and actual obedience. All the precepts of the gospel require, and all its promises are annexed to, obedience, to holiness, to habitual piety, without which no man shall see the LORD.

After a life worn out in vice and iniquity, is it reasonable to expect we should be carried up to heaven upon the wings of a few vows or prayers, in old age, or on a death-bed? Can we suppose a heavenly inheritance to be the easy purchase of a sigh or a tear, of a superficial sorrow, or an ineffective resolution? Can we think, that confessing and lamenting our sins, and purposing to forsake them when we can sin no longer, will atone for years wasted in iniquity? No: it should seem equally as reasonable, in the beginning of life, to pray that God would dispense with the observance of his laws, and excuse us the trouble of obedience, as at the end of it to supplicate his acceptance of us without it.

There are good grounds to believe, that our capability of happiness hereafter will depend upon the moral
frame

frame and temper of the mind, upon the virtuous habits and dispositions we have contracted here. But it is to the sinner a work of time, and labour, and perseverance, to oppose and conquer passions to which he has long surrendered himself, to subdue habits which have long enslaved him, and to accomplish an entire change or moral revolution in his mind, and consequently to render himself capable of happiness. Some persons indeed there are, who pretend to an immediate regeneration, or new birth, —to an instantaneous transition from a life of sin and guilt, to a state of purity and holiness. But such persons should seem to deceive themselves, by mistaking a pious resolution for complete repentance and amendment. A good resolution may be immediately formed upon some considerations suddenly presenting themselves to the mind; but an immediate change of the desires and affections, an instantaneous transformation from a vitious to a virtuous frame of mind, is neither consistent with common observation, or with the nature of habits.

Habits which have long had dominion over the mind, will long maintain the possession of it; and can only be conquered, as they gained ground, by slow and gradual advances. And though a dying sinner, under the circumstances in which he then finds himself, may not be sensible of their dominion, nor feel their power; yet this can give him no assurance of his deliverance or exemption from them. When inclinations, though not planted by nature, but of our own raising, are become habitual, they are ingrafted, as it were, into the soul, mixed with its frame, and as hard to be rooted out as those that are natural. Such is the difficulty of subduing habits; such, consequently, the disability the sinner lies under of obtaining happiness.

We are indeed assured, that whenever a sinner returns to God, he will have mercy upon him, and will abundantly pardon: but let us be careful rightly to understand what it is to return to God. As forsaking him does not mean neglecting to make him for some time the object of our thoughts, but a vitious conversation; so we have reason to conclude, that returning to God is not

not a sudden, importunate application to him, but a virtuous life. We must not presume, indeed, to prescribe bounds to the Divine Goodness; nor say, *Hitherto shall it come, and no further*: but this we may justly assert, that whoever expects happiness without holiness, whoever hopes to be admitted into heaven without actual obedience, without an actual progress in virtue and goodness, expects admittance upon other terms than are proposed in the Gospel.

Since, then, such is the danger of a dependence on a death-bed sorrow, it highly concerns us not to delay the necessary work of reformation and amendment. Various considerations might be offered to evince the unreasonableness of postponing this duty. But let us consider only the uncertainty of life, and we must see the imprudence of risking our salvation on the doubtful expectation of a late penitence. For can we be insensible of the precarious tenure by which life is held? Do we not daily see the healthy and secure surprised by the hand of Death; and though gay and flourishing as a flower in the field, yet as soon cut down and withered? Why then should we place the whole dependence of our souls upon the continuance of a life which the next hour may demand from us; why presume upon a secure and long possession of what hangs by a slender thread, which a thousand accidents may break asunder? What veil is it that is drawn before the eyes of men, and hides from them the transitory, uncertain nature of their present state?

Surely, did we consider, and amazing it is that we should not frequently consider, our own mortality, we would not risk the shortest delay in a matter so consequential, nor leave so important and irretrievable a stake to any degree of hazard and uncertainty. Death may come hastily upon us, and surprise us in the midst of our presumed security, in a day when we look not for him. But let us suppose, that this king of terrors, this universal conqueror, may not surprise us at an hour when we are not aware; but may give us previous notice, may make his attack by slow forms and regular

approaches, and may send some disease to be the messenger of his coming: yet how know we, whether we may have power to perform what requires great attention and composure of mind, of which the pains of disease, or the disorder of our intellectual faculties, may render us utterly incapable? or, if we have power, whether we may then have an inclination to attempt a duty to which long, inveterate habits may have strengthened and confirmed our natural aversion? Or, lastly, were the stroke of death so easy and gentle, that we were free from any severe corporeal pain, or intellectual disorder; were our inclinations to repent and return to God devout and sincere; yet, as they could be productive only of sorrow for sin, or a resolution to forsake it, this would not be strictly repentance, but only an introduction or preparative to it.

Let what has been suggested prevail with us to lay hold on the opportunity now offered (which to some of us may possibly prove the last), of turning to God by newness of life. Let not this holy season, which the piety of our church has set apart for the more solemn duties of penitence, slip out of our hands unregarded and unimproved; and instead of bringing us nearer to God, separate and remove us to a wider distance from him; and, instead of being employed in expiating and imploring forgiveness of our sins, be itself added to the number of them. *Humble thyself before thou be sick, says the Author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, and in the time of sin show repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be justified.*

Let us then comply with the duties suggested in this season of devotion, and begin without delay a repentance not to be repented of, and resolve to pay a determined, immediate, and universal obedience to the divine will. So shall the consciousness of that obedience support us in this world, and the well-grounded hopes of meeting a reconciled God smooth our passage into the next.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XXV.

On HUMILITY.

I PET. V. 5.

Be clothed with humility.

AMONG the whole catalogue of virtues, few seem to be held in higher estimation by the inspired writers, or come more frequently recommended to our attention, than Humility. This is a virtue of high rank, very different from pusillanimity, or meanness of spirit. It consists, not in low, derogatory ideas of human nature in general, nor in self-contempt, or forming an opinion of ourselves more to our disadvantage than we deserve; for that may not always be in our power. Conscious of our own ability or merit, we cannot differ from our own consciousness. Humility consists rather in that unassuming, ingenuous disposition of mind, which proceeds from an impartial judgment of ourselves, from a just and equal estimate of our own advantages and defects, compared with those of others. Its usual companions are, meekness, gentleness, candour: virtues of the fairest complexion, fit attendants on such frail and imperfect creatures as we are. It is nearly allied to mercy and kindness, and may indeed claim an affinity with almost every virtue. In many of its features, it resembles the portrait of Charity, as drawn by St. Paul: *It suffereth long, and is kind, envieth not, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly.*

What I propose in this discourse is, to show more explicitly the nature of humility, and by what conduct it may best appear. But since infinite, almost, is the variety of circumstances and situations wherein the dif-

ferent ranks and orders of men are arranged, and the actions flowing from thence not to be enumerated nor singly and particularly described,—we must limit the consideration of this virtue, therefore, to the general denominations of persons towards whom it is to be exercised, viz. superiors, inferiors, and equals.

I. Our superiors in rank or station are intitled to that measure of submission which the well-being of society, the laws of order, and established forms of respect, require: and Humility will teach us to acknowledge their superiority; to pay honour where honour is due; to suppress every inclination to asperse or depreciate their character or conduct; to feel no complacency in observing errors, or detecting foibles; knowing that we ourselves are of like passions, subject to the same defects, the same foibles and errors, which we are so quick to discern, and so forward to reprehend, in others. Though not restricted from censuring the most elevated characters, Humility will incline us not to be extreme to mark what is amiss, but to make every equitable allowance, and to moderate and temper censure with candour.

With regard to those who are superior in intellectual talents, humility consists, not in a mean adulation or dependence, not in an implicit submission to their judgment and understanding, and an obsequious servility of our own: but in paying a deference to superior wisdom in docility of disposition, and an ear always open to instruction; in suppressing all emotions of envy against the happier attainments and accomplishments of others; in acknowledging their possession, and applauding their improvement, of useful talents.

One particular alone there is, wherein even Humility does not require us to acknowledge any superior. We may admit the superiority of others in the powers of the mind or the acquisitions of fortune, in wisdom and knowledge, in the distinctions created by wealth, honour, and station; but, in the qualities of the heart, in rational piety, virtue and goodness, let us yield to no one the precedence. It is a most laudable ambition

to emulate the best, to aim at the highest moral excellence we can conceive ; and we ought to blush to confess ourselves inferior to the first characters in integrity, benevolence, and goodness of heart.

II. But as the object of our duty changes, so also will the method by which we must discharge it. Towards our equals humility will manifest itself by an obliging deportment, studious rather to decline than challenge pre-eminence ; in being just to the merits of others, though diffident of our own ; not affecting to be thought what we are not, nor ostentatious of what we are ; not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think ; nor displaying our own merit, nor publishing our own praise ; but, conscious of frailty, and knowing that no human excellence exists without a mixture of human weakness, inclined rather to suspect in ourselves some latent fault or defect, which may be visible to others, though self-partiality may throw a veil over it, and conceal it from ourselves.

When we look abroad, and observe how apt almost every one is to overvalue his own merit, to over-rate the accomplishments he has, and to imagine himself possessed of those he has not, it is natural to bring home with us a suspicion, that we ourselves may fall into the same error, and be subject to the same weakness. We ought, therefore, to be disposed to make all reasonable concessions and favourable presumptions ; and rather to recede from our own just claim, than arrogate unjustly ought to ourselves. Humility, 'like Charity, seeketh not her own. Every humble mind, conscious of its imperfections, will be naturally inclined to yield the precedence even to its equals.

III. But further : with regard to inferiors, Humility consists in assuming no more than the outward distinction of circumstances and the order of society render unavoidable. Humility forbids us to seek our own gratification in the inferiority of others ; forbids us to look down with contempt on those to whom Providence has dispensed its favours with a more parsimonious hand ; forbids us to insult their imperfections of body or mind,

or

or to glory in a barbarous triumph over the lowness of their birth, fortunes, employments, or abilities ; forbids us to despise even the lowest and meanest,—those who may seem least to deserve, but most need, our regard.

We ought, on the contrary, to make our possessions and enjoyments subservient to their wants ; and by kind condescensions, to soften superiority ; being conscious that we all belong to the same class of beings ; are all partakers of the same nature, and equal heirs of its corruption ; descended from the same stock ; and that the same dust is our original, and our end. The wisdom of Providence has been pleased to constitute a great diversity of ranks and subordinations in human life ; but this distinction of circumstances was not meant to give superiority an occasion to insult, but to assist, its inferiors ; it was designed to promote the general happiness, to make room for every virtue,—for those proper to subjection and dependence, and those also which can appear only in superior stations.

The duty of the text has now been in general explained ; but a difficulty still remains, how we may assure ourselves whether we possess this virtue, or how this general doctrine may be applied to particular cases. For what is in truth supercilious and faulty pride, the proud man may consider only as greatness of spirit, a due regard to superior distinction, a proper dignity which he assumes as becoming his rank and station. And this is indeed the common method by which the injudicious deceive themselves, and the guilty palliate their faults ; by a misapplication of names, giving to vice the appellation of some resembling virtue.

The only reply to this difficulty is, That, in the particular determination of our actions, every man's conscience must be his casuist, and every man's judgment his final rule. But it concerns us impartially to consult the unbiassed dictates of reason, not to cover any vice under the veil of a borrowed name ; but, laying aside, as far as may be, all self-partiality, to examine our conduct by that sacred and most equitable rule, of behaving

ing to others as we should think it reasonable in them to behave to ourselves; and then we may be able to distinguish between the false glosses and the true reasoning of the mind.

In order to engage our attention to this duty of humility, it might be proper to observe how much both our virtue and our happiness may be promoted by it. If this spirit once take possession of us, it will lead us peaceably through this vale of troubles; it will guard us, in a great measure, from the turbulent passions of others and from our own, and from the many uneasinesses which take their rise from both. It will preserve a serenity within us, and create no enemy without; will give us to enjoy that peace of mind which is the chief constituent of happiness; that tranquillity which the ambitious always pursue, but never possess. It will kill in us the seeds of pride, the vice that sticks closest to our nature; the first generally that appears, the last that forsakes us; often dissembled indeed, sometimes suppressed, but seldom subdued: a vice that assumes such different forms, veils itself under such a variety of unsuspected appearances, and steals upon us so unobserved, that there is no one weakness that oftener makes its way into the heart; but yet a vice that ill befits the weak, indigent, and dependent condition of man. For wherein is boasting? What have we that we have not received? Who is it that maketh us to differ from another? All we are, and all we have, we derive from the bounteous GIVER of all good gifts. What we call our own acquisitions, we owe to HIM, who gives both ability to pursue, and success in the pursuit.

This duty of humility comes frequently recommended to us in the gospel; and the greatest examples of piety recorded in the scriptures have been eminent for this virtue. Abraham, though styled the Friend of God, humbled himself with the name of dust and ashes. The father of the patriarchs acknowledged, that he was less than the least of God's mercies. And the great apostle of the Gentiles, who was taken up into heaven, and had revelations imparted to him too glorious for human language

guage to describe, yet considered himself as the least of the apostles, not meet to be called an apostle.

In the sacred writings we often find the Divine BEING approving this virtue of Humility. *Thus saith the high and mighty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite spirit.* Again: *To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* If, then God, who is so high, hath yet respect unto the lowly, let not Man think it a degradation of the brightest accomplishments, or the most elevated station, to be of an humble spirit.

When, indeed, we contemplate the stupendous glory and majesty of the Almighty SOVEREIGN of the universe: when we consider, that he has heaven for his throne, and earth for his footstool; that the wide expanse of heaven is to him only as a curtain or tent to dwell in; that he inhabits and fills a space extended beyond all bounds, the dimensions of which numbers added to numbers can never equal; that in his sight man is but as a worm, and all nations of the earth only as the small dust of the balance, as nothing, or as less than nothing, if less were possible:—when we thus contemplate the divine greatness, how little and unimportant must every thing appear that we call great upon earth! how mean all human pre-eminence! how diminutive the grandeur of the world! how inconsiderable the distinctions of power, wealth, and station, on which we set so high a value! Viewed in this light, all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, almost vanish and sink to nothing.

But when we consider withal, that this LORD of the universe himself, who hath his dwelling so high, who is infinite in dignity and greatness, is yet equally infinite in his condescension, and humbleth himself to behold the things that are on earth,—humbleth himself to hear, and to relieve, the least, the lowest, the most unworthy of his creatures, that call upon him; this surely should incline us to imitate the benevolence of such

such humility; and not to treat with arrogance, nor with contemptuous neglect pass by the meanest of our afflicted fellow-creatures, who look up to us for assistance; nor to think any condescensions beneath us that may remove or alleviate their sorrows.

Lastly, let us turn our eyes to the blessed Founder of our religion, who was not only the first that taught this doctrine of humility, but was himself the great pattern and example of it; who submitted to the infirmities of a nature so much inferior to his own; whose whole life was one continued scene of condescensions. The indigence of his birth, the indignities of his life, the ignominy of his death, equally proclaim him meek and lowly in heart. Let us his disciples follow our Lord in the paths of humility: let the same mind be in us; that, like him, we may be received hereafter into those blessed mansions, where lowliness of mind will be crowned with glory, and the humble shall be exalted.

S E R M O N XXVI.

ON CHARITY and MERCY.

Preached on occasion of a public collection for the benefit of the Royal Infirmary at Edinburgh.

MATTH. V. 7.

Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy.

THE virtue of mercy, recommended in the text, is a principal duty of religion. Whether we judge of its importance from its affinity to the Divine Nature, from its salutary influence on Society, or its utility to Individuals, we shall find it equal, if not superior, in rank and eminence, to every other virtue. Our SAVIOUR, therefore, in delivering his doctrine for the instruction of the world, takes care to distinguish this duty, to assign it a principal place in his moral system, and to recommend it to our practice as of the happiest consequence to ourselves: *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

In this discourse I shall offer some considerations to recommend this duty to your attention.

I. If we observe and consider our moral frame, we shall find that we are by nature formed to feel for the afflicted ; that we are under a powerful determination to the exertion, as well as the approbation, of Mercy ; and that, if there be any part of the divine law engraven upon our heart in deeper characters than others, it is this. There is in the human mind, a compassionate sense, a benevolent instinct, a social sympathy, which touches us with the sensations and passions of others, and makes their pains

pains and sorrows our own. Let us attend to the emotions of our heart when objects of severe distress are presented to our view. Are we not conscious of something within us that pleads for the unhappy, and bids us stretch out our hand to their relief? Is it not with some violence to ourselves that we harden our heart, or turn away our attention from the tears of the unfortunate? Are we not self-reproached when we withhold our assistance, or hide ourselves from their misery? and, on the contrary, do we not feel a secret complacency, a self-gratulating joy, rise in our mind, when we have laid hold on any occasion that offered, to impart consolation to the afflicted, to raise the heart that was sinking under the burden of its sorrows, or to brighten up the dejected countenance into joy and gladness? As natural it is to feel an inward satisfaction, and a virtuous joy of heart, in relieving the wants of the afflicted, as it is for them to rejoice in having those wants relieved.

The merciful man is kind to himself, as well as to the objects of his compassion; and receives an equivalent in moral enjoyment, for the enjoyment he bestows. Compassion may indeed seem to make a large addition to the troubles to which we are born, by rendering us subject to the pains and infirmities of others, and making us feel sorrows and misfortunes that are not our own. But yet the satisfaction which arises from mitigating those pains, and alleviating those sorrows, will more than compensate such uneasiness; upon which account, Solomon has well observed, that *a merciful man does good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh*. There is a conscious pleasure in the reflections of the merciful, which, as the same author expresses it, does good like a medicine; whereas the reflections of the cruel and oppressive, must embitter their happiest hours, and mingle gall with every enjoyment. Oppression must be painful even to the oppressor: and though habits may go far in gradually changing our nature, and rendering the heart callous and unfeeling; yet it is hardly to be conceived,

that a man can oppress the miserable, and afflict the afflicted, without doing great violence to himself.

As the pleasures of the mind are in the scale of enjoyments, higher and justly preferable to those of sense; so, of all mental pleasures, the most valuable are those of the moral and social kind. The exertion of kindness, benevolence and compassion, produces a most substantial and lasting pleasure; a pleasure not only superior to others in its immediate enjoyment, but of a much more durable and permanent nature. It does not, like sensual pleasures, take its flight the moment it is enjoyed; nor is it subject to satiety and disgust; much less is it followed by repentance or remorse; but is always grateful, is renewed by every subsequent reflection.

The pleasures of sense, indeed, scarce outlive the actions they attend; they immediately vanish, some in vanity, others in vexation of spirit, and all of them desert us in the needful time of trouble. But the pleasure of good actions never forsakes us: it is a faithful friend, that will attend us in the worst of fortunes, and will wonderfully support us under them. When we walk in the midst of trouble, or even in the vale of death, this will stand by and comfort us. The kind compassion we have shown to the distress of others, will then mightily lighten the burden of our own. Then the blessing of him that was ready to perish will come upon us, because we delivered the poor when he cried; the fatherless, and him that had none to help.

II. If we look up to the Supreme BEING, we shall find that nothing can be more acceptable to him, or make us approach nearer to his nature, or render us more the objects of favour, than works of beneficence and mercy. God is love. He is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works. He crowns us with his loving kindness; supplies our various daily returning wants; pours down on his creatures blessings and bounties with a liberal hand; and is ever communicating good, and diffusing happiness, through the immensity of the universe.

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Would we, then, recommend ourselves to this all-gracious PARENT of good? would we be assured of his favour? Let us copy the Divine Original; let us transcribe into our life and manners some similitude of his goodness and compassion; let us improve in ourselves the moral image of our MAKER, and endeavour to be merciful as he is merciful. The perfections of his nature place him infinitely above the need or possibility of requital from his creatures; and the principal return he requires, is, that we should be careful to imitate his goodness, to supply the place of Providence to the necessitous and indigent, and to have compassion on our fellow-servants, as our LORD hath pity on us.

III. Though the distinctions arising from affluence and indigence appear to be so unequally allotted to mankind by the supreme SOVEREIGN of the world, and with so little regard to moral qualifications, that this irregular distribution, this appearance of a partial and unequal care of his creatures, expressed in the differences of their rank and condition, has been sometimes formed into an objection against the administration of his providence; yet it is not from any partiality in God, who is no respecter of persons, nor from any defect in his care of his creatures, that the poor are always with us. If it had been agreeable to his unerring wisdom, it was infinitely easy to his almighty power to have levelled all distinctions, and to have diffused the riches of the world in equal distributions among mankind: or, if he saw it good, he who supported the people of Israel in a barren wilderness with bread from heaven; he who commanded the ravens to feed his prophet, and conveyed unseen supplies to the poor widow's meal and oil, so that it did not waste nor fail,—might still, by his immediate interposition, or by numberless methods to us unknown, dissipate all the cares and relieve all the wants of his creatures himself. But his wisdom chooses to send man to man for relief, and to convey his bounty to the poor through the channels of the rich.

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A little attention might convince us, that the various classes of mankind, the numberless diversities of rank, station, and condition, execute a wise and benevolent plan of Providence, are necessary to preserve the order and well-being of society, and to connect and endear mankind to each other. But it ought to be remembered, that eminence of power, wealth, or station, only constitutes us superior servants in this great family of the world; and that we are commanded by the supreme Householder, the LORD of the universe, to do justice to our fellow-servants, and to give them their meat in due season. Let not those who abound in wealth, and have much goods laid up for many years, let them not imagine, that these favours are granted merely for the purposes of personal indulgence, only to enable them to bid their souls take their ease, and to fare sumptuously every day. Their wealth ought rather to be considered as a fund, of which a portion is to be applied to their own use, but another part to be appropriated to the payment of those debts of mercy that are due to the necessitous and indigent: nor can we be justified in engrossing and hoarding up the bounty of Heaven, farther than may consist with this equitable claim of the poor and needy.

The best use of riches is to be rich in good works. Never apprehend danger of wasting your substance by being merciful after your power; by giving plentifully, if you have much; or, if you have little, by doing your diligence gladly to give of that little. For when do we see a fortune ruined or impaired by the alms of charity and mercy? It is not charity; it is luxury, intemperance, pride, profligacy, and other vices, which are the wings that riches make to themselves when they fly away. The scripture abounds with promises of the immediate blessing of Heaven upon this duty of mercy. *Thou shalt surely give unto thy poor brother; and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul,*

soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon-day; and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And reasonable it is to believe, that the eyes of the LORD, which are in every place, will more particularly watch over the righteous; and that his providence will, even in this world, distinguish with peculiar favour those whom the virtues of charity and mercy recommend to his protection.

But however the divine wisdom may see fit to order this, sure we are, that lastly, in the final event of things, at the great and awful judgment of the last day, the merciful man shall obtain mercy; and this is of much more moment to him than every other consideration. There is indeed a pleasure and satisfaction in the very acts of mercy, and in the hopes that we are objects of God's present favour; but the highest consolation is, that charity will secure us an interest, and bespeak the divine favour, at that last decisive tribunal that will fix our fate for ever. Then it is the memory of our good deeds will stand by and support us: every good action we have done, among others the charity of this day, will bear witness on our behalf; and our mercy to others will plead for mercy to ourselves. For the great inquiry there, will, according to our Saviour's description, principally turn upon acts of charity and mercy.

The forms and solemnities of that judgment, as described in the gospel, may bear some resemblance to those observed in human courts of judicature; but very different will be the rule of proceeding. At that awful bar, we shall be tried, not only for sins of commission, but for those of omission also; not only for the violation, but the neglect, of duties; not merely for our iniquity, but our want of charity and mercy. Little it will avail us to say, (if we could say), that we have committed no wrong, if we have done no good. In vain shall we plead, (though we might truly plead), that we have been regular in our devotions, temperate in pleasures, faithful to our promises, just in our dealings, if at the same time we have not been merciful after our power.

What

What confusion of face must cover us at that awful tribunal, when an account of our powers of doing good, and withal the abuse of those powers, shall be produced against us ! How shall we then wish, (though in vain), that we could redeem the time past, and recal the years that are fled ; or that we might be permitted to enter into life a second time, and be born again, in order to improve every opportunity to the purposes of mercy, and to fill up every hour with kind offices to others, which will at that tribunal prove so beneficial and happy to ourselves !

Let us, then, anticipate the great day of account ; let us imagine ourselves at the bar of Heaven, and ask the questions that will be then demanded of us : Have I, according to my power, fed the hungry ? Have I clothed the naked ? Have I relieved the sick ? Have I supplied the wants of the indigent and necessitous ? If to these interrogatories Conscience can faithfully reply in the affirmative, we are then those happy servants whom our Judge will bid to enter into the joy of our LORD. But if our heart condemn us, conscious that we have been deficient, and have left undone those works of mercy that we ought to have done ; let us, that we may avoid the dreadful sentence that will in that case be pronounced, let us no longer refuse mercy to others, lest we ourselves find judgment without mercy ; and no longer stop our ears at the cry of the poor, lest we also cry, and not be heard : Let us cherish a humane, benevolent disposition ; and give full scope to the exertion of kindness, compassion and bounty, towards proper objects,——rejoicing when it is in our power to relieve distress, and grieved when it is not. Let us be merciful after our power ; benevolent enough to take in all objects of compassion, but prudent enough to select the most deserving.

Frequent indeed are the mistakes of the charitable heart and the liberal hand ; nor is it always easy, to distinguish between real and counterfeit distress : but here permit me to observe, that your benevolence is now requested for the relief of some who have an undoubted claim

claim to compassion, as they suffer under one of the greatest distresses our nature is liable to; for such surely is poverty aggravated by sickness,—laborious poverty, disabled from earning the honest reward of industry. Were it our lot to lie down in sorrow, and languish on the bed of sickness, like those who this day crave your compassionate aid, how fervent would we be in our supplications to Heaven! with what vows and prayers would we solicit and importune the restoration of health! But how little should we deserve a favour that we are disinclined to grant! Upon what grounds could we expect that mercy for ourselves, if we now refuse it to our fellow-creatures? Or, if we now happily possess that first of earthly blessings, Health; what more pious acknowledgment, what more grateful offering, can we make to Heaven than this oblation of charity? what more proper expression of our gratitude to God, than thus to have compassion on our afflicted Brethren? what more certain and effectual method to derive on us the blessings of HIM who is the Comforter of the sick, the Father of the fatherless, the Protector of him that hath no helper, than thus to imitate the divine goodness, and to be merciful as he is merciful?

May your charitable offerings on this occasion ascend as incense to the throne of God, and be accepted as a sacrifice well-pleasing to him. May they recommend you to the divine favour; and as the objects of your mercy cannot recompense you, may you be recompensed at the resurrection of the just!

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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